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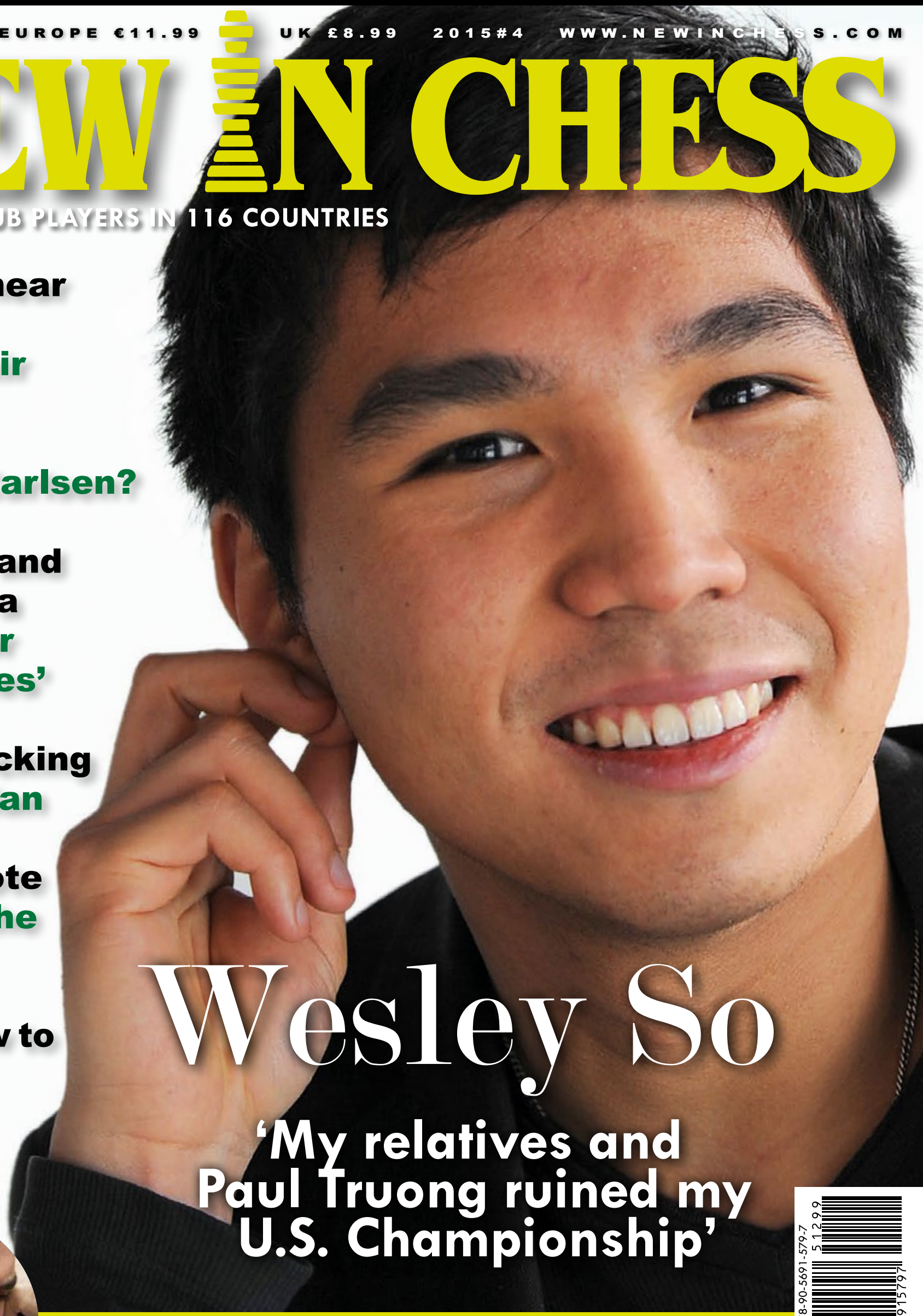

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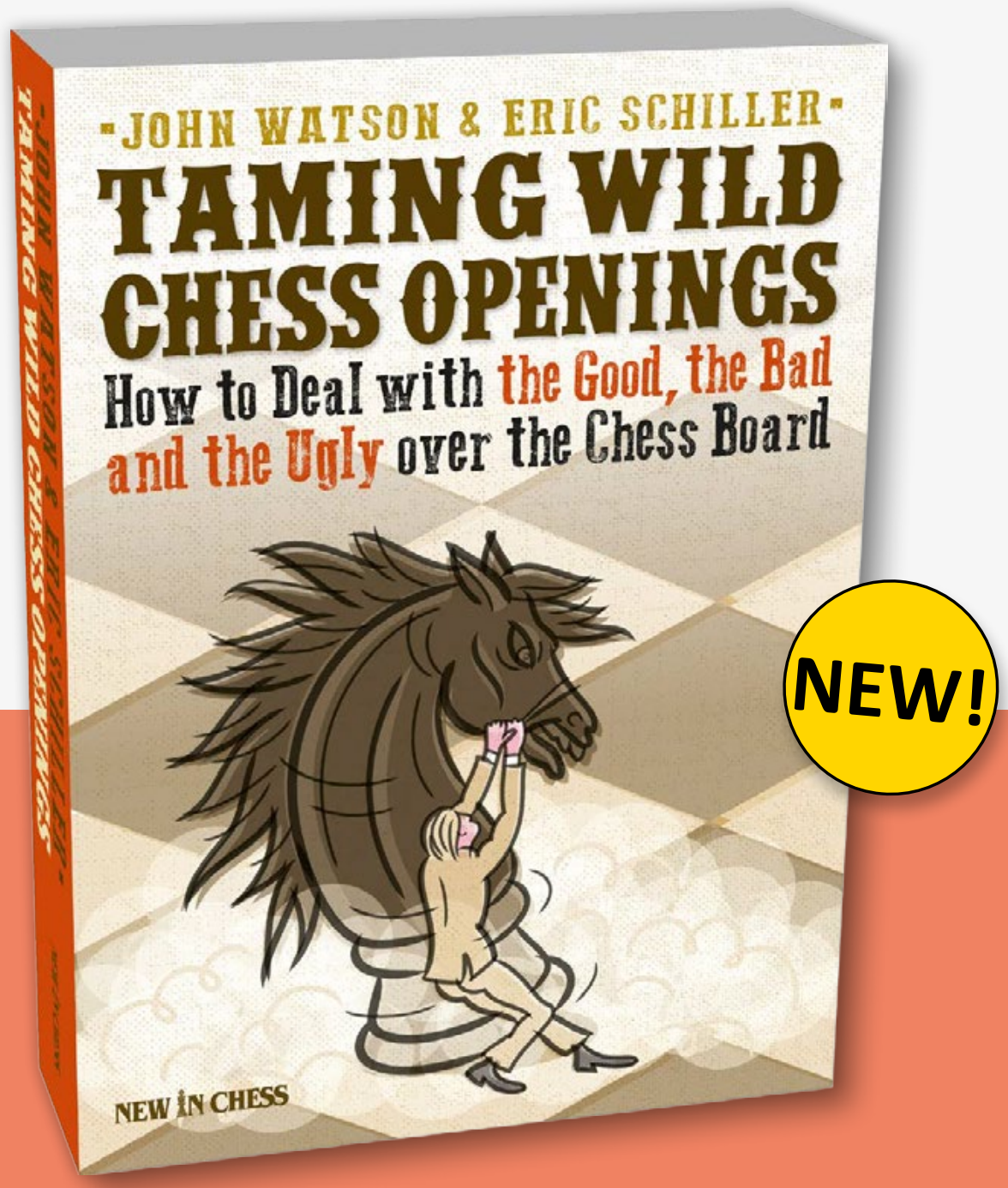
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'Maintaining concentration for five or six hours at the board is tougher at 50 or 60 than generating the bursts of energy needed in blitz.'
Garry Kasparov

Your magazine

In the evening, the participants of the Gashimov Memorial in Shamkir often dropped by in the lobby bar of the Excelsior hotel. On two nights, almost all of them were there, watching Garry Kasparov and Nigel Short battle it out in St. Louis. As they cheered on the combatants at the other end of the world, I realized once again that GMs are first and foremost chess lovers.

You find that same passion in Kasparov's account of the Battle of the Legends in this issue. And you feel a similar deep love of the game when Magnus Carlsen speaks about his wonderfully creative win against MVL in our Shamkir report.

'As they cheered on the combatants at the other end of the world, I realized once again that GMs are first and foremost chess lovers.'

When Carlsen rose to the top, we all knew he was the natural heir to Kasparov, but who will succeed the Norwegian? A hot candidate is 16-year-old Wei Yi, and you should not miss the eye-opening profile of the Chinese prodigy that our correspondent Jilin Zhang wrote.

Another rising star is Wesley So, who went through a rough patch recently. In a candid, at times shocking, interview the brand-new American tells his side of the story.

We not only want you to know more about the finest players, we also want you to find out more about yourself, and how you can improve your game. There are tactical puzzles to be solved and lots of useful insights to be gleaned from the superbly annotated games.

Let Wei Yi demonstrate to you that taking risks often pays off. Or let Garry Kasparov teach you that keeping the initiative can be more efficient than grabbing material. Parimarjan Negi gives you some great tips that you can apply in your next game, and this issue's SOS shows you an aggressive way to deal with the ultra-solid Catalan.

On our letters pages, lively discussions are going on. We are always happy to hear from you, so keep sending us your thoughts and opinions. It's *your* magazine, after all.

Dirk Jan ten Geuzendam
Editor-in-Chief

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Your Move

Facing Bobby Fischer (1)

Congratulations to Dirk Jan ten Geuzendam for his insightful article 'Facing Bobby Fischer' in New In Chess 2015/3. It's remarkable that in hundreds of articles, columns, books, and interviews over the years, few if any members of the chess community have ventured to break the taboo and address Fischer's long-standing mental illness, especially in such detail and with such forthrightness. Here in the United States, Fischer's contemporaries generally avoided saying anything at all critical of him, and a significant minority could be described as cultish in their devotion. When it came to 'Bobby', they excused ugly behaviour and racist rants, and bought into his conspiratorial theories about everyone from patrons, assistants, fellow players, police, governments (and of course storage facility owners!). To this day, it's hard to broach the subject without arousing animosity.

Another myth is that Fischer somehow 'went bad' (or went mad) only *after* the match and as in his later years (you have to explain away the 9-11 comments, which were too public to deny, without admitting that he was mentally ill all along). But many years before Reykjavik you would hear stories about his angry rejection of people who had helped him from teenage times on, usually including some outrageous accusations against them.

DJtG correctly points out that one reason for the general reticence was to appease and maintain access to Fischer. That was only part of the problem. U.S. chess organizations were literally invested in promoting the noble Fischer legend (old issues of *Chess Life* are embarrassing), since their salaries and status (and 'friendship' with Fischer) depended upon it. In addition, a lot of players were emotionally invested in Fischer as the ideal genius: the lone, principled, anti-Communist gunslinger in the Wild West. So they simply suppressed anything negative about him, or worked it into their vision of heroism and macho honesty. There is also a celebrity aspect to this phenomenon. Even those who generously helped Fischer and then were ruthlessly cut off by him remained starstruck, and proud that they were his 'friends'. As the article points out, separating the genius from the person is not an easy thing to do.

After all these years, Fischer's behaviour is still frequently excused as 'complex', 'rebellious', or 'tragic'. So the emperor's procession continues after death; thank you for openly pointing out that he had no clothes.

A U.S. player from
'the Fischer generation'
(who prefers to remain anonymous to our readers to avoid personal reactions -ed.)

Facing Bobby Fischer (2)

In New In Chess 2015/3, Dirk Jan ten Geuzendam seems to proffer the notion that (ex post facto) Bobby Fischer was in fact mentally ill: especially so in light of the documents revealed in the latest work of David DeLucia. Reference is also made to Ponterotto's *A Psychobiography of Bobby Fischer* (2012): a work that relies upon the American Psychiatric Association's fourth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (2000): it has subsequently undergone a massive revision with the publication of the fifth edition in 2014. Is Mr. Ten Geuzendam suggesting that we all know a mentally ill person when we meet or see one or their respective artefacts? Unlike Dr. Ponterotto, he makes no mention of a young Bobby Fischer parented by a transient mother who for decades underwent ongoing surveillance by the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

The articles by Genna Sosonko and Hans Ree in the same issue seem to offer a tantalizing counter-point. Mr. Sosonko reiterates what most of us in the chess audience have been reading for years: rarely has Viktor Kortchnoi failed to direct ad hominem comments at his opponents after the conclusion of an encounter. Hans Ree seems to euphemistically approach the post-retirement career of Garry Kasparov, who holds himself out as world political affairs maven and polymath holding unique perspectives of history.

In case we forget, mention should be made of Dr. Reuben Fine, a chess grandmaster who went on to become a psycho-therapist of Freudian bent and author of *The Psychology of the Chess Player* (1956). Alas, we are deprived Dr. Fine's own self-analysis and the reasons that led to his four marriages: of course far short of the count mentioned recently in New In Chess for Henri Grob.

Didn't some supposed wise person once say to the effect: 'Before removing the speck of dirt from another's eye, we must first remove the specks from our own'?

Michael Allard
Bowie, MD, USA

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Facing Bobby Fischer (3)

Dear Dirk Jan ten Geuzendam. I was very impressed with your article on Bobby. You are the only person I know who dealt with the Gligoric-like behaviour too many of us exhibited. Bobby harmed many innocent people with his anti-Semitic screams. Compassion for him and a wish to remain in his good graces isn't good reason for our silence. Many of us are bound to feel guilty for our cowardly self-serving behaviour.

I exempt the Chess Hall of Fame. You could not have this institution if you report on the actual lives of our great players. (You couldn't have it for former U.S. Presidents or baseball-players or any other greats.) And Frank Brady is a working journalist who needed to appeal to an audience. I support his choice.

At this time I think of Bobby as a dime-a-dozen paranoid who was our

great chessplayer, not a romantic view which would lead to so many books and films. I question even the Bekins event or any other incidents given as possible causes for his behaviour other than unlucky genes.

What will we do with the next great mentally ill players? Can we be captivated by their moves and still denounce them, which I think is the strategy you suggest? Shall we report on the anti-Semitism currently exhibited by an aging, physically-ill great player who has not gone public? What if he went public, will compassion trump the need to denounce this stuff?

You've done something very important in raising these issues.

Stuart Margulies
New York, NY, USA

Short skirts the problem

I am a recent subscriber to New In Chess. It seemed like a lot of money to pay for a magazine, but I thought it would be worth it. After reading Nigel Short's insulting opinions on women in chess published in New In Chess 2015/2, I fear perhaps I was wrong. Why spend money on a publication that gives a platform to the view that my gender is less capable than men in *any way*? That money is much better spent supporting initiatives that empower girls to one day compete at the very highest level – the way any reasonable person knows they're capable of. I would like to take this opportunity to refute his (outdated, sexist, scientifically unsound) arguments as well as pose some more reasonable suggestions as to why more women aren't currently competing at the top level.

Short solves 'the eternal chess conundrum of why women lag behind their male counterparts' with a conclusion entirely lacking in nuance: men and women are just so gosh-darned different! As groups, we just naturally excel in different areas. This answer is just too neat and tidy for my taste, and I don't think it does any justice to the complexity of the question. His evidence is flimsy at best, and punctuated by off-topic personal attacks against other members of the chess world, but it includes the extremely interesting point of men dominating the highest levels of bridge, as well as a comment on how he and his wife have (completely equal) strengths that just so happen to fall into stereotypically gendered boxes. You know, the kind of thing infamous for not accurately representing society at all – cue the chorus of emotionally intelligent men and women who do in fact manage to park their own cars.

'When I'm reduced to a pair of legs I'm not using those legs for my male opponent's enjoyment… I'm using them to get the heck out of there.'

His arguments rest on the belief that 'men and women's brains are hard-wired very differently.' This is just factually untrue. It's true that our brains are not exactly the same, but the differences have been highly exaggerated, and there is no widespread difference in cognitive function. (As Short notes, [perhaps to avoid labels of sexism, which makes sense considering he had just posited that the 'outrageously-sexist' Jan Hein Donner may have had a point] his daughter has excelled academically in ways his son has not). On Twitter in a reply to @CasualChess, Short links to a study by *Psychology Today*, a study that references no sources and that even accepting what it says as true *still* wouldn't account for differences in chess performance.

Women face unique challenges in entering the chess world and being taken seriously in it. Short's words are just one example. What follows are only some of the possible barriers. First, the overt sexism: I have heard and experienced too many horror stories of women being refused games in clubs, turned down by coaches, being accused of cheating after every win, as well as being sexually harassed at tournaments. These are common, hurtful, tragic experiences. Short says 'many girls drift away from chess, for no obvious reason.' Mr. Short, how much more obvious does it have to be for you to see that not only is the sexism there, it is incredibly damaging? While some girls and women do battle every day to prove their worth, many more are very reasonably choosing to not spend precious time and energy fighting to secure their place in a world that says very clearly 'you are not welcome here.' Conversely, the chess world can be too welcoming, making women feel uncomfortably sexualized, which can be just as bad. For instance that common half-joke, half-serious statement from men saying they'd have more fun playing a young woman in a short skirt instead of a man anyway… I am a young woman and I am often in a short skirt but when I'm reduced from a legitimate competitor to a pair of legs I'm not using those legs for my male opponent's enjoyment… I'm using them to get the heck out of there.

Second: There is a distinct dearth of female role models for young girls to look up to – in this respect the Polgar sisters were clearly pioneers. I have seen several articles linking a young Fabiano Caruana with Bobby Fischer. Caruana was lucky to have parents that could support his dream, moving him to Europe to gain an edge. Without role models who prove it can be done, can we blame parents of young girls for not taking such extreme measures? When young girls are readily given the same opportunities we are sure to see many young women giving Caruana a run for his money.

Your Move

Third: women are taught that competitiveness is *unattractive* and that of course attractive is the most important thing a woman can be. Women also face societal pressures to 'have it all', to balance a successful career, marriage, and children while making it all look easy, and to look like they just stepped off a runway. Men, conversely, enjoy the luxury of it being socially acceptable for them to privilege their careers over other aspects of their lives… in fact it is sometimes even expected. These issues are not specific to the chess world but are widespread problems in our world. These are only some contributing factors, as I'm sure there are more. When we work to change these outdated structures, it is clear that women will find more and more success in chess. (I believe this also accounts for the bridge discrepancy.) I am extremely fortunate that my experiences, which were still enough to drive me away from chess for years and to avoid tournaments entirely even though I grew up very competitive, have not been as severe as those of my older female friends. I find this trend incredibly heartening, as well as the 'positive discrimination' whose legality Short regards as dubious. In spaces where women are clearly welcomed and encouraged we aren't dropping out… we're thriving, and I am happy to see more of these spaces appearing.

My final point – I am a chess fan. I want to watch interesting, exciting chess from interesting, exciting players. By encouraging more women to play chess, to reach new levels of skill, and to participate widely, there will be more great chess in the world. Why 'gracefully accept' this 'yawning chasm of ability' when instead we could bring more fans and more great chess into the world?

Maya Marlette
21, student, chess player,
excellent car parker

Slip of the pen

In New In Chess 2015/3, Hans Ree explained that (probably) no Russian leader, even if he were a liberal democrat, would have left what he called a *violent anti-Russian coup* in 2014 unanswered. The U.S. and the EU supported that coup, so they are in the eyes of Hans Ree the main culprits concerning the crisis in Ukraine. Unfortunately, this is a misrepresentation of the facts, because what happened before the coup was left out. I mean this: the former president of Ukraine was on the point of signing an economic treaty with the EU, to the benefit of the Ukrainian people. But Mr. Putin did not like this and he put the Ukrainian president under heavy pressure not to sign the document but, instead of that, to make a deal with Russia. (Would a liberal democratic Russian leader have done the same? Certainly not!)

The Ukrainian people did not accept the violation of their sovereignty by Mr. Putin and they reacted the way we all know. It was a matter of course that the U.S. and the EU supported the Ukrainian people against foreign aggression; they could not have acted otherwise.

I like the articles of Hans Ree very much, but this slip of his pen I could not left unanswered.

Frans Erwich
Wassenaar, The Netherlands

Postscript Hans Ree:

Our serious difference of opinion should not be described as a 'slip of the pen'.

Holy smoke!

Congratulations, Jan Timman! You have won the prestigious prize, *Strongest Hash-Smoking Chess Player of the Late 1970s and Early 1980s*. Although the awards process began late last year, we, like our counterparts in Stockholm, prefer to deliberate in secret and to emerge only once we have reached a decision. This year, the Awards Committee was based in Tuscaloosa, and you should know that you have many fans here in Alabama as well as in several other third-world countries. Enclosed is a gift certificate in the amount of 500 Euros, to be spent as you wish.

We were hoping, by this date, to have a plaque prepared for you, or at least a handsome certificate, but alas, we do not. Because the Committee took over six months to make its decision, we felt that there should be no further delays in notifying you. The long deliberation was not due to the inherent difficulty of the decision, but rather to the natural laziness of those interested in such awards.

In bestowing this honour upon you, the Committee took note of your great successes at the chessboard during the late 70s and early 80s. Also, at one meeting, a Committee Member displayed a picture of you from that time-period and said, 'Doesn't he look like Jesus? I mean, the man was clearly stoned!' This led to a discussion of whether Mediterranean Jews in the ancient world typically had blue eyes and blond hair. That question aside, the Member's observation held great sway because the meeting was occurring in the Bible Belt.

Other honourable candidates were considered but rejected. As regards Mssr. Ljubojevic, we did not wish to recapitulate the Hartoch-Minic debate but simply took you at your word (see New In Chess 2014/5, p. 92) that the man had no fun. When Mr. Karpov's name arose, one Member took to her feet and proclaimed, 'Anyone can see that the World Champion was as sober as a judge at a show trial!' That remark was stricken from the record but was also seared into the minds of those present. With respect to the young Mr. Kasparov, one Member opined that 'Harry's' behaviour during the early '80s suggested an acquaintance not with hashish but rather with cocaine. This, no one disputed. Finally, as regards the Vice-Champion, one Member suggested that Mr. Kortchnoi's paranoia during that era was strongly indicative of hashish dependence. But then another Member opined that most of the trees which Mr. Kortchnoi saw in those days did in fact contain Soviet spies, and it was that opinion which held sway. In the end, the vote in your favour was unanimous.

Dr. Stuart Rachels
1989-1990 U.S. Co-Champion and
Committee Chair
Tuscaloosa, Al., USA

Peak rating 2882

Peak rating 2686

NO PROGRESS

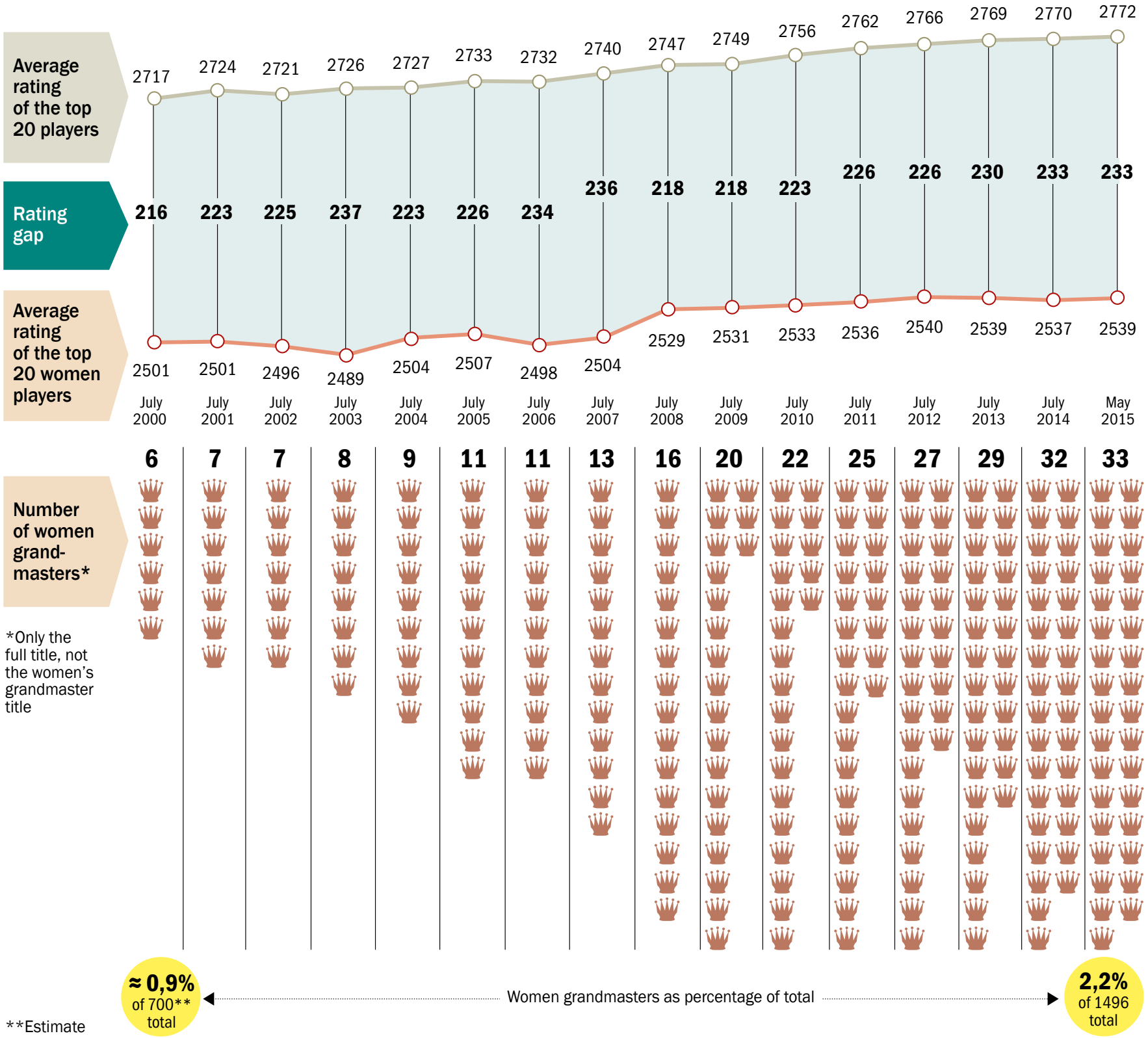
The ratings gap between the current top male player, Magnus Carlsen, far left, and the top female player, Hou Yifan, left, is greater than it was during the time when Garry Kasparov, right, was No. 1, and Judit Polgar, far right, was the top woman.

Peak rating 2851

Peak rating 2735

The persistent gap between men and women

In New In Chess 2015/2, Nigel Short wrote that women were not able to play chess as well as men because of physiogical and genetic differences. Short based his conclusions in part on the fact that while there have been two women (Judit Polgar and Hou Yifan) who have been able to break into the ranks of the top players, women, in general, have made little progress in overtaking men. The first graph below illustrates his point. The ratings of the top 20 women players have improved since 2000, but the gap with the top players has not narrowed. On the other hand, the number of women grandmasters has increased more than 400 percent over the same period, though they still are a small minority of the total. *DYLAN LOEB McCLAIN*



Blitz Bliss

Surrounded by rows of transfixed spectators, two grandmasters are blitzing out moves with only seconds left on the clock. The air is full of adrenaline. Can it get any better? The players are Alexey Shirov and Erwin l'Ami and, although Black is a pawn up, the game will soon end in stalemate and a draw.

The sixth Rabat Blitz Marathon, held in the Mega Mall in the Moroccan capital, attracted a fair number of grandmasters and lots of strong local players. Top seed was blitz ace Shakhriyar Mamedyarov, but it wasn't the Azeri favourite who took first prize, but the man who graced the cover of our previous issue, Erwin l'Ami. And once again, just like at the Reykjavik Open, the game that got him really going was his win against Mamedyarov! The Dutchman was unstoppable and finished with an amazing total of 18½/21, without having lost a single game.

When he called his win in Iceland a 'once-in-a-lifetime success' in his article in New In Chess 2015/3, we told him: 'Come on Erwin, you're only 30!' And indeed, after this new victory, we can only wonder what more is in store for Erwin 'Er... win-win' l'Ami.

LENNART OOTES

A beautiful mind

Returning from a trip to Norway, Nobel Prize-winning mathematician John Nash was killed, along with his wife, Alicia, in a taxi crash in New Jersey. He was 86. Nash's life inspired

Magnus Carlsen presented John Nash with a Play Magnus Educational Chess Set.

the Oscar-winning movie *A Beautiful Mind*, starring Russell Crowe.

In Oslo, John Nash had received the Abel Prize from the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters together with Louis Nirenberg, a mathematician from New York University. On the evening before the awards ceremony, Nash had requested to meet World Champion Magnus Carlsen. It was shown on Norwegian TV station NRK, and Magnus presented Nash with a signed chessboard and set. The Nobel laureate said that he encouraged his son (who was also diagnosed with schizophrenia) to play chess, and asked the World Champion whether he thought the game could be good for mental health. 'I think it keeps the mind active, I suppose,' replied Magnus.

Chess on the rocks

The Winter Olympics, with its spectacular ski jumpers, daring speed skaters and athletic snowboarders, should welcome chess into its schedule, recently said FIDE president Kirsan Ilyumzhinov to the Chinese media while in Beijing, the favourites to host the 2022 Winter Games. Having chess included in the Olympic Games has long been Ilyumzhinov's dream, as every Russian school boy knows.

But the IOC have steadfast refused to go along with his dream. When told that the Summer Olympic program was full, he then turned his attention to the Winter Olympics – going as far as highlighting to anyone in the IOC who would listen, that the media have come to regard curling as 'chess on ice'; even pointing out that curling now has also introduced a 'chess clock' element into all their competitions.

When it was specified that sports in the Winter Olympics must be played on snow or ice, Ilyumzhinov suggested, in all seriousness – despite the room turning into disbelief and laughter – that chess would 'fit quite well' in the event as the players could use chess pieces made out of ice.

He further explained that at June's upcoming meeting between the IOC and FIDE he would present letters from 100 countries in support of

Kirsan Ilyumzhinov: cool thinking.

chess' inclusion in the Winter Olympics. And added, 'The ancient Greeks said that sports was the combination of strength and intelligence. The Olympics has strength and FIDE will bring the intelligence.'

Legalize Caruana

Talking about snow, ice and frigid temperatures, 270 teams and over 1,100 chess enthusiasts made the annual pilgrimage to the US Amateur East Team championship at the Hilton Hotel in Parsippany, New Jersey last February. For the purists, there was an overall chess winner: the Virginia Assassins. However, out of the many non-cash prizes on offer for this unique team event, the coveted one is not for playing but the ever-popular competition to create amusing and fitting team names. This year, beating hot favourites such as '50 Shahades of Grey', the winner by acclamation was: Legalize Caruana!

And indeed, putting an end to all rumours, Fabiano Caruana has announced that he will no longer be playing for Italy but will represent the country of his birth again. Tellingly, the announcement was made from St Louis, Missouri, where retired investor Rex Sinquefield's chess club has become the hub of American chess. Caruana's return will complete the 'Dream Team' for next year's Baku Olympiad, as he joins forces with Hikaru Nakamura and Wesley So. World champion Magnus Carlsen – à-la the humorous spin *The Daily Show*'s Jon Stewart put on it – was the quickest off the mark with his tweet of the worst kept secret in chess: 'So they are indeed buying nerds!'.

How to cheat at chess

In his wonderfully witty 1977 book *How to Cheat at Chess*, Bill Hartston said 'If God did not want us to analyse on our pocket set in the toilet, he would not have given us paper on which to make notes.' Now, nearly 40 years on, in what looks like a digital age update, it seems we use the toilet paper not to write notes on but instead to wrap a hidden hand-held computer in.

If only this were a joke, but that's exactly how Georgian champion Gaioz Nigalidze was caught cheating during April's Dubai Open. His opponent, Tigran L. Petrosian, grew mightily suspicious with Nigalidze's frequent trips to the toilet and always using the same stall. Arbiters, on Petrosian's request, carried out a search and found a toilet-paper-wrapped iPod Touch nestled behind the bowl

BILL TIDY (IN *HOW TO CHEAT AT CHESS*)

The toilet: the cradle of chess cheating.

in the stall Nigalidze was so fondly attached to. Initially, the Georgian denied it was his. But when the arbiter turned it on, the game was up, so to speak, because not only did a playing engine pop up that had been crunching his current position, but it also had his Facebook page open!

Nigalidze is now set to face a lengthy playing ban for being caught red handed… or is he? It seems that the ECU president and FIDE vice-president, Zurab Azmaiparashvilli, doesn't think so. Speaking to a Georgian newspaper, he said in defence of his fellow countryman: 'People have been too harsh with him, virtually demanding the death sentence. Gaioz is guilty and should be punished, but he has not done anything deserving the death penalty. The strength of the chess program he was using could be compared to light doping. The guilty must be punished, but we should acknowledge that he has admitted his guilt. We should also take into account the difficult financial situation faced by his family. It seems to me that Nigalidze should be banned for one or two years maximum.'

Gaioz Nigalidze: guilty but no death penalty.

A FingerFeller

And talking of cheating, the cause célèbre of the dark art was French grandmaster Sébastien Feller. Remember him? Yes, of course you do – he was the one that got fingered in a sophisticated cheating scam involving mobile phones belonging to the French federation, text messages to a player slaving over a hot playing engine, and vigorous hand signals from an over-enthusiastic team captain at the Khanty-Mansiysk Olympiad in 2010 that saw Feller unjustly rewarded with an individual gold medal and 5,000 euros.

He and his accomplices were subsequently banned following an inquest by the French federation – but there then followed one all-mighty palaver of a legal wrangle in the French civil courts that led to no serious action being taken against Feller. However, FIDE eventually, and somewhat reluctantly, stepped in with the Ethics Commission enforcing a two-year nine-month ban, extended until Feller returned said gold medal and the cash. And according to the latest online missive from FIDE, he recently has. Now, like the reformed character he no doubt is, Feller can return to play in FIDE tournaments, where everyone will no doubt be welcoming him back with open arms – just don't be making any hand signals with them when you do see him in the tournament hall!

But we have some questions here for FIDE. First, why not take a leaf out of the IOC's book and take overall charge of directly implementing automatic bans for cheating rather than passing the onus onto national federations? Secondly, while we're obviously pleased to hear that Feller has finally returned his ill-gotten booty, why wasn't he also stripped of the rating points he illegally amassed by cheating? More important, however, could well be the question as to why his opponents lost their rating points, as they are innocent victims of someone else's cheating here.

Sébastien Feller is back.

What's more, we seem to recall that a special commission was tasked with dealing with the rating-wrangle issues – yet so far we've heard no word on what has or hasn't been decided, or indeed if it was in fact ever discussed at all.

Discouraging encouragement

Which doesn't mean that FIDE hasn't taken any decisions concerning cheating, although a few rules that they have introduced seem to first and foremost discourage reporting any suspicions of cheating. First, according to a new FIDE rule, a player must report any incident of cheating to the arbiter in writing – so excuse us for asking the bleeding obvious here, but doesn't this prevent a player doing so at the most optimum moment, such as during a game when a cheater is most likely to be caught? And also – just to encourage the complainant a bit more – the accuser will face a three-month ban if they twice report suspicions where the method of cheating cannot be identified. ■

Carlsen shakes rivals in Shamkir

With one of his best performances ever, **Magnus Carlsen** claimed the second Vugar Gashimov Memorial. The gap between the World Champion and the cream of the young crop remains huge. The only challenge came from 45-year-old **Vishy Anand**, who played sparkling chess and climbed back to second place in the world rankings. But then, as 'Sir Alex' puts it, 'Vishy is Vishy'.

Dirk Jan ten Geuzendam

The Azeris just love Alexander Khalifman. At the party in the garden of the Excelsior Hotel halfway through Shamkir Chess 2015, a small group hangs on the lips of the 1999 FIDE World Champion. In Tromsø, during the last Olympiad, the grandmaster from St. Petersburg was the cap-

Magnus Carlsen's victories in Shamkir inspired this painting by Azeri artist Chingiz Abassov.

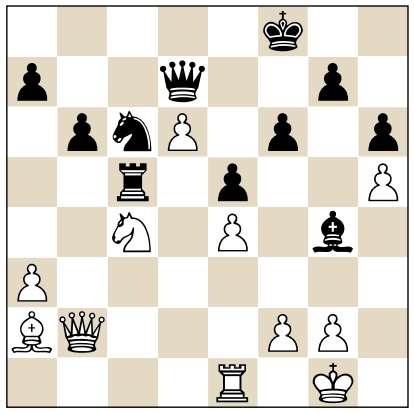
tain of the Azeri team, but now he is here as the trainer of Rauf Mamedov, the lowest rated player in a superfield topped by the World Champion. Mamedov affectionately calls his trainer 'Sir Alex', a jocular reference to former Man United coach Alex Ferguson that also conveys serious respect. Khalifman is full of praise when he speaks about his ward's talent and his play so far. With a mocking voice he says that no one expected anything from Mamedov. Well, perhaps one prearranged draw, but look, he's already held his own against three opponents, Vachier-Lagrave, Giri and Kramnik. Mamedov listens with a smile. He is 25 years old and will turn 26 on the last day of the tournament, when he faces Magnus Carlsen.

Khalifman has a theory that he firmly believes in, but that invoked the criticism of colleagues when he first propounded it. According to him, you should not look at the rating of a player to assess his potential, but at how close he is to the age of 25 to get an idea of how high he can reach. In modern chess, where memory plays such a prominent role, 25 is the perfect age, the benchmark. And when he says memory, he doesn't mean remembering a variation that

you have looked at 10 years ago. What he means is what a colleague GM told him the other day: that, these days, if you don't look at a line for a month, it means you have never looked at it at all. And he believes that the benchmark of 25 years may even have to be lowered if we look at the average age of the Chinese team that won gold in Tromsø.

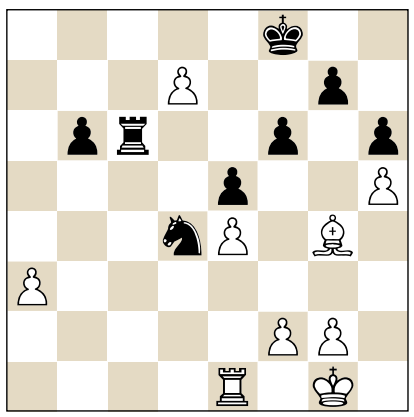
Khalifman's theory is not a scientific theory, but more a rule-of-thumb, a starting-point for drawing tentative conclusions – which is what he does when we speak at the closing party five days later. He starts by mentioning the old guard, the players closest to his own age (49): 'If you look at my old colleagues Vladimir (Kramnik, 39) and Mickey (Adams, 43), they didn't show anything special here.' And indeed, Adams had a terrible tournament and Kramnik's performance was little short of traumatic. The former World Champion began to lose control after a highly uncharacteristic calculation error against Mamedyarov in Round 5.

Alexander 'Sir Alex' Khalifman and his ward Rauf Mamedov at the garden party on the rest day.



Mamedyarov-Kramnik
Shamkir 2015 (5)
position after 30...♘c6

31.♘xb6! axb6? A brief blackout. After 31...♕xd6 32.♕b3 ♗e6 33.♕xe6 ♕xe6 34.♗xe6 axb6 35.♗d5 the position would be more or less balanced. **32.♕b3 ♗e6 33.♕xe6 ♕xe6 34.♗xe6 ♘d4 35.♗g4 ♖c6 36.d7**

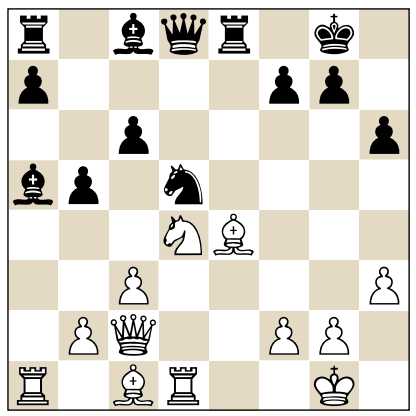


A huge difference. The exchanges were identical, but the white d-pawn is still alive. It took Mamedyarov a while to convert his advantage, but win he did (1-0, 76).

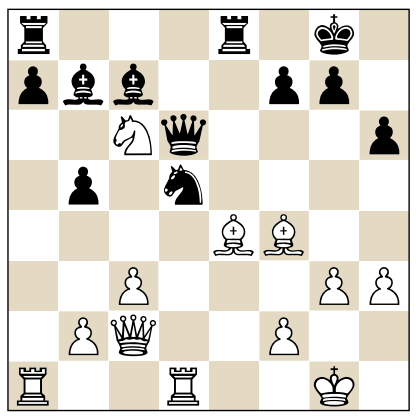
When Kramnik lost again in Round 6, against Caruana, a popular question was whether the Russian had ever lost two games in a row. In fact, we didn't have to go back in history too far, since he lost back to back games against Karjakin and Svidler in last year's Candidates' tournament. Perhaps more relevant was the question of a Russian colleague who wondered, in view of his next opponent, whether Kramnik had ever lost three games in a row. And indeed, his black game against Magnus Carlsen resulted in a painful third loss.

RL 7.1 – C65
Magnus Carlsen
Vladimir Kramnik
Shamkir 2015 (7)

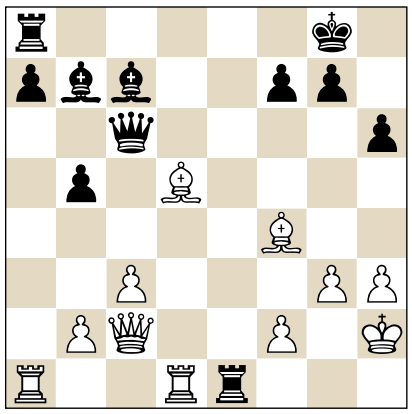
1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.d3 ♗c5 5.c3 0-0 6.0-0 d6 7.h3 ♘e7 8.d4 ♗b6 9.♗d3 d5 10.♘bd2 dxe4 11.♘xe4 ♘xe4 12.♗xe4 exd4 13.♕c2 h6 14.a4 c6 15.♖d1 ♘d5 16.♘xd4 ♖e8 17.a5 ♗xa5 In hindsight, Kramnik liked 17...♗c7 better. **18.♘f3 b5 19.♘d4**



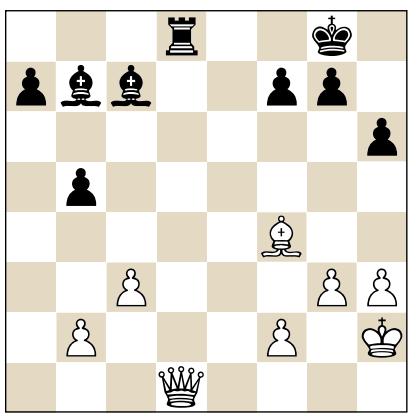
19...♗c7 Looking for complications that will not turn out favourably for Black. As Kramnik said: 'I have no idea why I started calculating all these things.' Carlsen pointed out that after 19...♗b7 20.♗xd5 cxd5 21.♘xb5 ♗b6 22.♗f4 it's just equal. **20.♘xc6 ♕d6 21.g3 ♗b7** Kramnik had thought he could play 21...♗e6, missing 22.♘b4.
22.♗f4



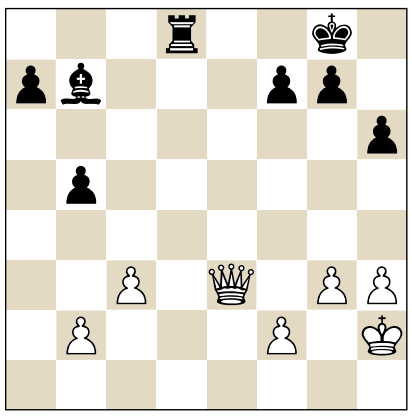
22...♕xc6 And here he had missed that after 22...♕c5, 23.♗xd5 ♗xc6 24.♕f5 hurts. **23.♗xd5 ♖e1+ 24.♔h2**



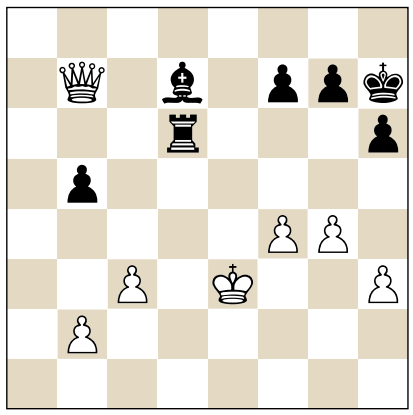
24...♕xd5 Giving up the queen; but he had no choice. For instance, 24...♕b6 fails to 25.♗xb7 ♖xd1 26.♖xd1 ♕xb7 27.♖d7 ♖c8 28.♕f5, and Black can resign. **25.♖xd5 ♖xa1 26.♖d1 ♖xd1 27.♕xd1** The twists and turns have all been very interesting, but the queen gives White very good winning chances. **27...♖d8**



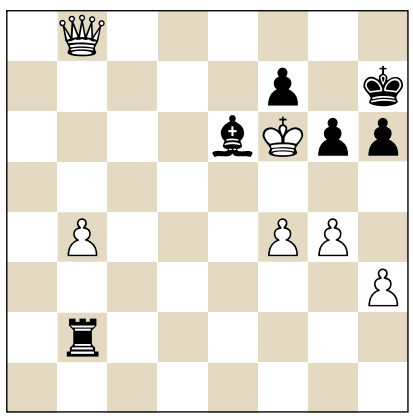
Black should at least have tried 27...♗xf4. **28.♕e2** Perhaps even stronger was 28.♕g4, when 28...♗b6 29.♗xh6 g6 runs into 30.♕f4! ♖d1 31.♕b8+, and wins. **28...♗b6 29.♗e3 ♗xe3 30.♕xe3**



30...♖d1 Magnus thought that Black's only chance was 30...♖a8, although here, too, White should be able to win. **31.g4 ♗c6 32.♕c5 ♗d7 33.♕xa7 ♖d2 34.♔g3 ♖d3+ 35.♔f4 ♔h7 36.♕b7 ♖d2 37.♔e3 ♖d6 38.f4**



Slowly but surely Black is pushed back. **38...g6 39.♕b8 ♖d5 40.♔e4 ♗e6 41.♕b7 ♖c5 42.♔d4 ♖c4+ 43.♔e5 b4 44.cxb4 ♖c2 45.♔f6 ♖xb2 46.♕b8**



A direct mating attack decides the issue. **46...♖f2 47.f5 gxf5 48.♕g3 ♖f1 49.g5** Black resigned.

The one 'colleague' that didn't fit into Khalifman's picture was Vishy Anand (45), who played sparkling chess, finished clear second, crossed the 2800 mark again and rose to second place in the world rankings. Sir Alex's verdict was clear in its vagueness: 'Yeah, but Vishy is Vishy.' And indeed, it would be hard to come up with a better description of the former World Champion's unique talent.

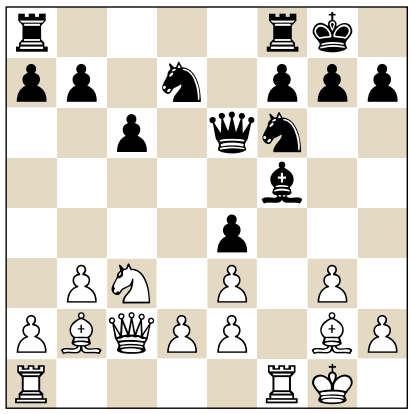
Anand's first-round game against, of all people, Magnus Carlsen, might have been the harbinger for anything. The Indian reached a very promising position, but as so often in the past, the Norwegian dug in his heels, escaped at the very moment that Anand thought he had him on the ropes and tenaciously fought on for a draw. If this affected Anand's self-confidence, he didn't show it, although he had to wait till Round 5 for his first win. But it was well worth the wait. In a furious and complex struggle he defeated Wesley So, who at that point was the proud leader with 3½ from 4.

'Obviously the win with Wesley was very, very important to get started,' Anand said, 'because otherwise you can get into this drawing rut, as we saw with many others.' And there was more to come. In Rounds 7 and 8 he beat Adams and Mamedyarov, both with exchange sacrifices. With a big smile Anand confided: 'I felt young again.'

Perhaps it was the remark of a friend of his, that for almost a whole year he had hardly sacked a pawn, that stung him into action. The first exchange sac was begging to be made.

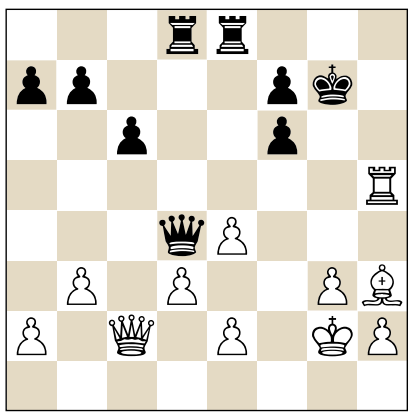
NEW IN CHESS

Vladimir Kramnik played a traumatic tournament. We cannot recall the 14th World Champion losing three games in a row.



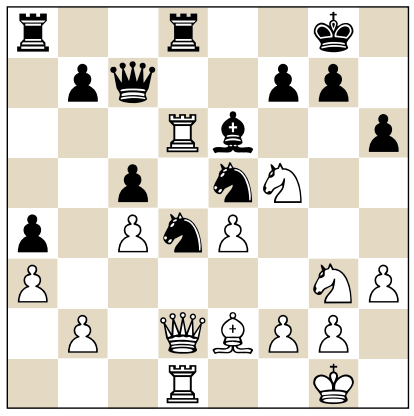
Anand-Adams
Shamkir 2015 (7)
position after 14...♕e6

15.♖xf5! Hard to resist. Without any risk White obtains a promising initiative. **15...♕xf5 16.♘xe4 ♕g6 17.♖f1 ♖fe8 18.♗xf6 ♘xf6 19.♘xf6+ gxf6 20.e4 ♖ad8 21.♖f4 ♕h5 22.d3 ♕e5 23.♗h3 ♔g7 24.♔g2 h5 25.♖f5 ♕d4 26.♖xh5**



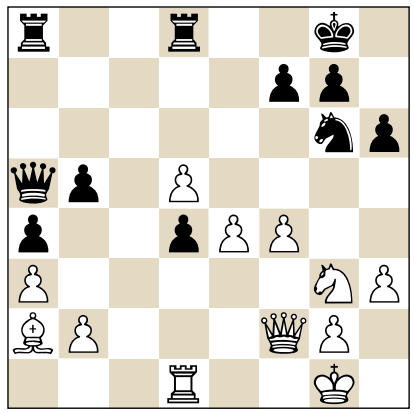
And this is what he has got for the exchange: two pawns and nice play against the black king. There were still some hurdles to take, but the outcome was never in any real doubt (1-0, 51).

The second exchange sac was a clear demonstration of excellent form.

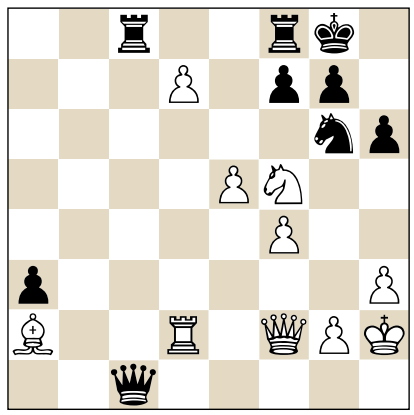


Anand-Mamedyarov
Shamkir 2015 (8)
position after 27...♘e5

28.♖d5! Of course White could play 28.♖xd8+, even though it doesn't promise much, but this is much stronger. **28...♗xd5 29.cxd5 ♕b6 30.f4 ♘g6 31.♗c4 ♕a5 32.♕f2 b5 33.♘xd4 cxd4 34.♗a2** And this is what it has led to. The mighty white pawn front, combined with threats against the black king, soon decided the issue.



34...b4 35.♘f5 bxa3 36.bxa3 ♕c3 37.e5 ♖ab8 38.♖d2 ♕xa3 39.♘xd4 ♕c1+ 40.♔h2 ♖bc8 41.d6 a3 42.♘f5 ♖f8 43.d7



After 43...♖cd8 44.♕d4 there is the terrible threat of 45.e6. Black resigned.

Anand took the tournament very seriously and arrived a couple of days earlier. My guess was that he wanted to

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have some time to adjust to the local time, but the real reason was different. 'No, the funny thing is that there is no time difference between Chennai and Shamkir! We're only half an hour ahead, we're in the same time zone. Chennai and Shamkir are not the best connected cities, I can tell you. My travel time was something like 36 hours. I went the wrong way for two time zones, and then went to the right time zone. Nothing terrible. It wasn't as if I was hanging around the airport. That would have been far from ideal. I took a morning flight from Delhi to Istanbul, spent the whole day in Istanbul, and then took the 3 a.m. morning connection to Ganja and then to Shamkir. Because the travel time was so weird, I thought it would be better to have a couple of extra days to sleep it off and all that.'

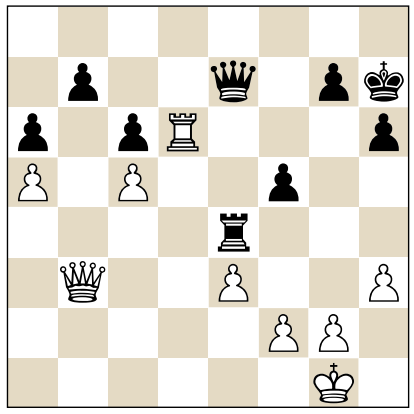
Anand's result in Shamkir left many journalists scratching their heads, and I must admit that after his loss to Carlsen in the last World Championship match, I also considered the possibility that he would end his superb and rich career there and then. Instead, speculation about younger challengers has dwindled and suddenly there is talk about a possible third Carlsen-Anand match. Said Anand: 'I understand the idea that I have done a lot, but why should that stop me playing chess? Of course, a result like this makes you feel a lot better about continuing, and so on, but it's not as if I have a dialogue with myself all the time. I've been through enough cycles and twists to know that when the good results come, you enjoy them, you savour them, you don't question them. When the bad ones come, you don't obsess about them and that's it. This result I will enjoy. I will sleep well tonight; it will be a pleasant flight tomorrow. When you play an excellent tournament and then blow the last round, all you've done is ruin your flight back (laughs). This time that didn't happen. And in three days life will go on. That's it. But I'll enjoy those three days. I know now that that's what it is about.'

NEW IN CHESS

Vishy Anand: 'When the good results come, you enjoy them, you savour them, you don't question them. When the bad ones come, you don't obsess about them and that's it.'

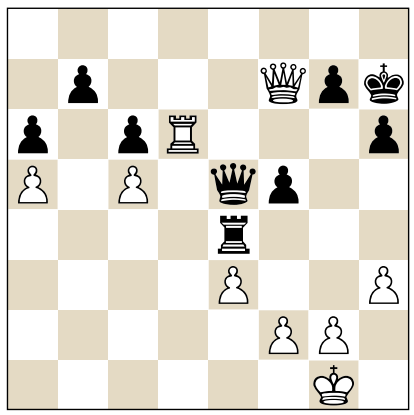
Which takes us back to Alexander Khalifman and his apt conclusion that 'Vishy is Vishy'. As far as possible younger challengers are concerned, Khalifman restricted himself to Fabiano Caruana (22) and Wesley So (21), who shared third place. 'Caruana is a good guy. To me it seems that he has some fear to fight Magnus. He doesn't yet know if he wants to or not. Wesley So is very interesting. His style is not Carlsen's, and it's nothing we are used to. But he has to face his old problems, because psychologically he is very unstable during the game. He is very talented, of course, and as far as the ideas he brings to chess are concerned he is the number two.'

The uncontested number one, also in Khalifman's view, remains Magnus Carlsen, the 24-year-old Norwegian (25 on November 30th) who in the last round spoiled Rauf Mamedov's 26th birthday to finish one point ahead of Anand and way ahead of the rest. For a long time the Azeri GM seemed to be holding (which would have meant shared 5th place) until one weak moment ruined his position.



Carlsen-Mamedov
Shamkir 2015 (9)
position after 34.♖d6

White has been pushing for almost the entire game, but so far it has not been enough, and after 34...♖e5 Black would still be standing. **34...♕e5? 35.♕f7**



The move Mamedov had missed. He had looked at 35.♕xb7 ♖c4 36.♖d1 ♖xc5 37.♕xa6 ♕c3, and Black holds. After the text-move Black cannot both protect the f5-pawn and defend against the threat 38.♕g6+ and 39.♖d8 mate. So he resigned.

Rather than talk about the mistake Mamedov had made, Khalifman preferred to express his admiration for Carlsen. 'Everyone talks about Carlsen and his opening preparation. or rather lack of opening preparation. In my opinion his opening preparation is something very special, absolutely unique, but I am at a loss to say what it consists of.

'Botvinnik told us that opening preparation is of paramount importance for top-level chess. Then Fischer developed this precept to an incredibly high level. Then, in the Karpov-Kasparov era, things only got crazier, when computers entered the competition. Kasparov was the first player to use them, so he had a certain advantage. But Carlsen's advantage is not about knowing more about computers.

'Carlsen's opening preparation is something very special, absolutely unique, but I am at a loss to say what it consists of.'

'It's really great to see such a genius at work, but whether he still can grow... In Kasparov's case it was possible to foresee that he was going to improve. In Magnus' case I don't think so, he is almost perfect. His style is almost perfect. He is so good that he is number one in the world by a large margin. I see no contender at the moment, but this may change. After all, people also believed that Karpov was perfect, his style, everything. And then Kasparov came.'

Magnus Carlsen's victory was not only a far better version of last year's win, when he had to fight back after two losses, it was also the result of a professionally planned operation. Unlike some of the other participants he avoided the energy-sapping night flight from Istanbul to Ganja (an hour's drive from Shamkir) but travelled via Baku by day. He even brought the food he is used to and a cook to prepare it. He ate those meals in the restaurant of the hotel, but like last year, he spent most of his time in his suite, the same one as before.

I drop by while in the garden below the preparations for the closing din-

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ner are in full swing. On the table sits a bottle of Isklar, Norwegian mineral water, a reminder of the food from his home-country that was shipped here. Magnus is in a good mood, as he has been for the duration of his stay in Shamkir.

'I did feel very good before the tournament. I think I would have been surprised if I had done spectacularly badly here. Throughout the tournament I was pretty relaxed, a bit like in Wijk in 2013. Feeling physically fine and also relaxed, not lying awake thinking about the games, something that happens in almost every tournament. There's always going to be one or two days. When I play a bad game, I wake up and think about what happened in the game and also what I am going to do in the next game. But this time I slept well.'

What did you do to feel good?
'I had a training session in Qatar with Peter (Heine Nielsen) and Fres (Laurent Fressinet; on his return to Norway, Carlsen revealed that there had been another secret second. His name didn't remain a secret for long, as China's number one player, Ding Liren himself, accidentally revealed it in an interview – DJtG). We worked on various things, some of which I got to show here, some of which I didn't. And we did a lot of sports, so I was feeling very good physically. I also solved some exercises and we played some blitz, and it seemed that in general I was in good shape.'

Who selects the exercises? Peter?
'Yeah, Peter. Although if he gives me particularly difficult ones, I tell him as politely as I can that he should do his job.'

And that he should not undermine your self-confidence...
'Yeah. (At this point Peter Heine Nielsen, who is also in the room, starts laughing and picks up one of the two sticks that are lying on the floor. They have brought them from

NEW IN CHESS

After a well-nigh faultless performance, Magnus Carlsen had good reason to give himself a thumbs up.

Qatar. One has a hand that gives a thumbs-up, the other one a thumbs-down. Peter shows Magnus the red hand with the thumb down. Magnus continues unperturbed.) Sometimes you get tired of looking at openings. Let's do some simple exercises, just to train the intuition, basically by saying what comes into your mind first, and then solve some more difficult problems. It was funny that towards the end of my game against Maxime (Vachier-Lagrave) it did feel a bit like a study. Perhaps not a very difficult study, but I knew I needed to find a solution.'

You are known for your wish to go your own way and to avoid theory if possible. Your game against Maxime must have been a dream game.
'Yeah. It's always interesting to play Maxime. In my games against him I have struggled quite a bit. He always plays very well against me, it's always tough. Even this game was tough, but he was certainly going for it by playing ...b5 on move two. He knew that we'd get some fresh positions, and he feels that he can match me there. This game was very good and the other games... I just win them somehow. In general I thought that in many games I showed good technique, and also quite good calculation, but nothing spectacular, of course. You cannot expect such spectacular games all the time. I think that having one really good win in a tournament, that is already something special.'

You arrive here feeling great and then you immediately get into trouble against Anand...
'I was fine after the opening and then I just thought for a few minutes and made this straight blunder. I was lucky that my position was only lost after that, that it was not like losing immediately. At some point I thought I might have chances to hold, but it seemed as if I couldn't do anything positive at all. Then I realized that my only chance was to put my king on g8, and set up some kind of barrier. The thing is, it was not obvious how he was breaking through, and I basically had to make only moves, which was a good thing. As it was, he thought for a long time and realized that there was no simple win and went for something that he thought might work... Maybe he should have shuffled around a bit...'

Is it also psychological? You're known to defend so well and people start seeing things that are not there?
'Yeah, maybe, but it's typical that you sit and look for a forced solution and start spending a lot of time, and then it is tempting to go for something forcing instead of shuffling around. Maybe deferring the decisions till after the second time-control. It's not easy; it requires a lot of patience and even then you're not sure you are going to get there in the end.'

Could you say in hindsight that this was the perfect start?
'Ha! I would have preferred to play an actually good game. I am happier with the way I dug in, and looking at Vishy's play in general in the tournament, I should not be unhappy with a draw.'

Would it have been a completely different story if you had lost that game?
'Yes, of course. But I think I would still have had good chances to do something. On the other hand, he might have relaxed more, not gone for it in the last few games, you never know.'

In the past months there has been all kind of talk about possible challengers and now we may once again have to think about Vishy...
'They're all too uneven at the moment. Caruana is playing some very good games, but against me, he just collapsed. And Wesley (So) also played some very good games, but had a couple of bad losses.'

How do you see him at the moment?
'He's very dangerous and it's not so easy to understand how he plays. Sometimes I cannot understand his moves. He has... an interesting style. I mean, he sees some things in his own way. He likes material, for sure. He has the ability to evaluate strange positions; he's very strong.'

It's funny that there are still people who say that you don't dominate like Kasparov or Fischer. I think you're dominating immensely at the moment. Do you have that feeling?
'(Thinks) I am playing quite well at the moment, but sometimes even I am surprised, for example in the game against Fabiano. I didn't expect to win that one (laughs). And sometimes my opponents don't play as well as I expect, but that's the way it goes. I mean, they all play very well, but I am just a lot more consistent. Apart from the first game, I didn't blunder anything. At least, I think so. I don't think the strength of one's performance should only be based on the number of bad mistakes, but it certainly helps a lot and it makes a bit of a difference to the other players, I think. Obviously there are also things that I understand better than others,

'Wesley is very dangerous and it's not so easy to understand how he plays. Sometimes I cannot understand his moves.'

but the biggest difference is consistency. Being consistent will yield you a lot of points.'

How happy were you with your game against Kramnik?
'I thought the game was really nothing special. We both know where he made his mistake. The mistake was an unnecessary one.'

Do you think psychology played a role?
'I have no idea. I am sure Kramnik doesn't want to be compared with Jobava too much, but it reminds me a bit of what I have said about Jobava. You see some ideas and you realize they might not work, but then you go for them anyway. As Kramnik said himself, there was no reason to go for this stuff. White cannot be better anyway. He was just risking a lot.'

The year has started well for you. Do you look at the events ahead of you as part of a year?
'No, not particularly. It's gone quite well so far, obviously with some tournament wins. Both in Wijk and also in Baden, I was quite happy with the creative content in my games and I felt in general that I was outplaying my opponents. I also had some very bad moments in those tournaments. Here the bad moments were fewer. It's looking positive. It feels like this is the way I should be playing. There should be more tournaments like this, where the games are decent and the score is good, rather than what has been the norm for some time, where there are some good games, there are some bad games, and in the end I am there, but sometimes not quite.'

And this is what you relish, this search for perfectionism?
'Eh, yes. It cannot be perfect obviously, but in this tournament, scoring 7 out of 9 (smiles), you cannot expect better. And it's not as if this score was completely undeserved. It really feels a bit like in Wijk, where I won a few games in a row (Nielsen, astonished, because he is talking about five games: 'A few?') and I was thinking, why don't I do this every time (smiles)? But next time it might be a struggle. I'm sure Vishy feels the same way. I mean, why is he not doing this every tournament, scoring plus three?

NOTES BY
Peter Heine Nielsen

RE 20.8 – A05
Magnus Carlsen
Maxime Vachier-Lagrave
Shamkir 2015 (5)

Magnus had a good start to the tournament with three points from four rounds, but even so he was trailing Wesley So, the leader, by half a point. This game from Round 5 was very important for the final standings. While So lost to Anand, Magnus won and took the lead, never to let it go again. But more important than scor-

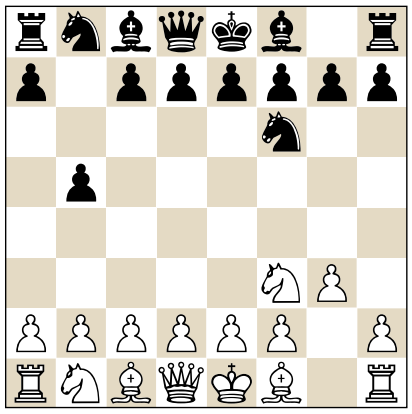
ing a win was the fact that this creative effort left him in high spirits for the remaining rounds.

1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.g3

The concept Magnus used in Games 1 and 3 in the World Championship match in Chennai, and very different from what he did earlier this year in Wijk aan Zee, where his game against Vachier-Lagrave was a sharp theoretical debate in the Grünfeld. Here he aims for an early exit from any preparation, although what happened next was completely unexpected.

2...b5!?

Played after some six minutes of thinking, and not as reckless as it looks. Karpov and Leko have played it, just to underline its solidity. With White committed to g3, Black can afford to allow himself some liberties. Putting the bishop on b7 while grabbing more space than with ...b6 makes sense. After 1.♘f3 b5 2.e4 ♗b7 3.♗xb5 Kramnik beat Magnus as White in the Botvinnik Memorial rapid tournament in Moscow in 2011.



3.♗g2

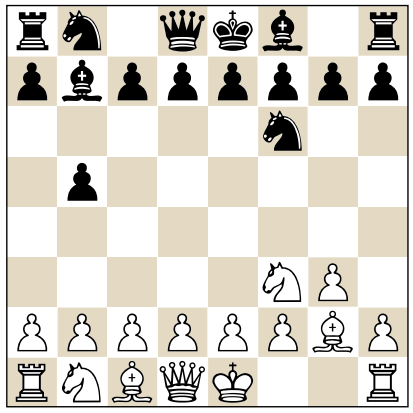
Magnus thought for a while before playing this rather obvious move. Instead, 3.c3, similar to 1.b4 c6, intending ♕b3 or a4, makes sense, but he did not see a way after 3...e6!? 4.♕b3 (4.a4 b4! is the point of 3...e6) 4...a6 5.a4 ♗b7 6.axb5 ♗d5! 7.c4 ♗xc4!, which seems fine for Black. Similar to his game against Kramnik, even the potentially strong 3.e4 ♗b7 4.♗xb5 crossed his mind, but in the end he decided to be creative in yet another way.

3...♗b7

NEW IN CHESS

Maxime Vachier-Lagrave was obviously disappointed after his loss to the World Champion, but made no secret of the fact that he, too, had enjoyed the creativity started as early as move 2!

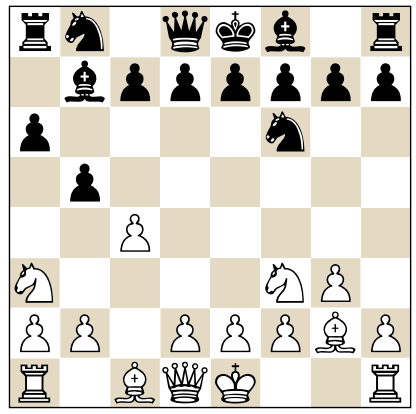
Quite a rare sight, almost similar to 960 Chess, where you will see the players thinking hard at the very start of the game instead of just playing theoretical lines.



4.♘a3!? The standard move is 4.0-0, and Aronian won a nice miniature against Ipatov after 4...e6 5.d3 ♗e7 6.e4 d6 7.♘d4 a6 8.♘b3 c5? 9.e5! ♗xg2 10.exf6 ♗xf1 11.fxe7, and Black loses material.

4...a6 4...b4 was certainly worth considering: 5.♘c4 c5 (5...e6 6.♘a5, with a3 to come, may be a little unpleasant) 6.d3. Maxime was a bit worried about this, as the knight will be nicely placed on c4 after a subsequent e4.

5.c4

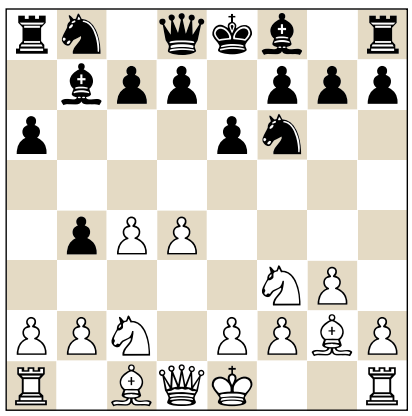


5...b4

An interesting alternative was 5...e5!? 6.0-0 (6.cxb5 ♗xa3 7.bxa6? ♗xf3 8.♗xf3 e4 is one key difference between Black's pawn being on e6 or e5) 6...e4 7.♘h4 (7.♘d4 is also unclear) 7...d5 8.cxd5 ♕xd5 9.d3 g5? (9...♕e6 might be playable, but did not really appeal to Maxime) 10.♘f3!. This is what Maxime had seen, and White is indeed much better here.

And there was also 5...e6!? 6.cxb5 ♗xa3 7.bxa6 ♘xa6 8.bxa3, and while the computers seems to disagree, Magnus felt that the extra pawn should be worth a little something here.

6.♘c2 e6 7.d4

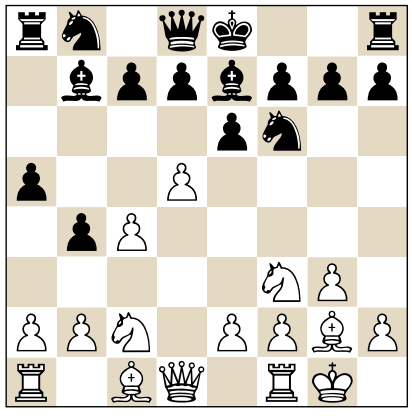


7...a5

After 7...♗e7 8.a3 a5 (8...bxa3 is met by 9.b3, and after capturing on a3 White has a slight but stable structural advantage) 9.axb4 axb4 10.♖xa8 ♗xa8 11.♗d2 Black will have to play ...♘c6 or ...♘a6, which is rather awkward.

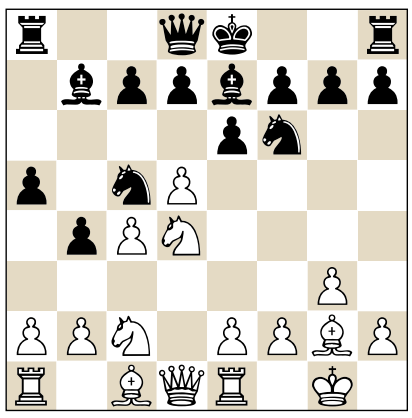
8.0-0 Now, however, 8.a3 loses its point, as Black is ready for 8...b3 9.♘e3 a4, when the black pawn-structure becomes impregnable.

8...♗e7 9.d5



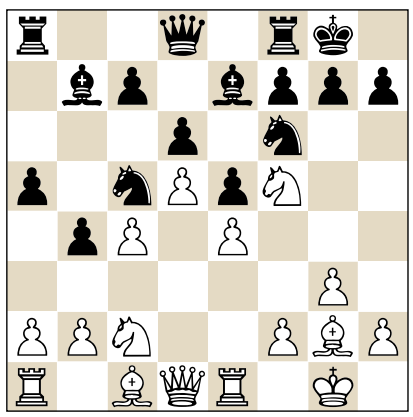
9...♘a6 After 9...exd5, 10.♘fd4 gives White a huge initiative with no realistic way of keeping the extra pawn for Black. Instead, he eyes the c5-square, which, due to the pawns on d5 and b4, is an ideal square for a black knight.

10.♘fd4 ♘c5 11.♖e1



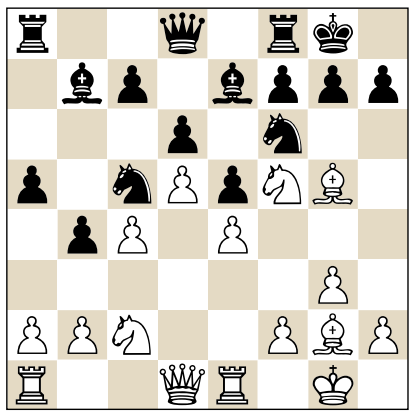
11...0-0 Probably making it too easy for White. Instead, 11...♘fe4, intending 12.f3 ♘d6 to attack c4, makes it more difficult for White to advance in the centre, as 13.b3 creates a hole on c3. Therefore 12.♘b3!? looks like the right move, still keeping a pleasant edge.

12.e4 e5 13.♘f5 d6



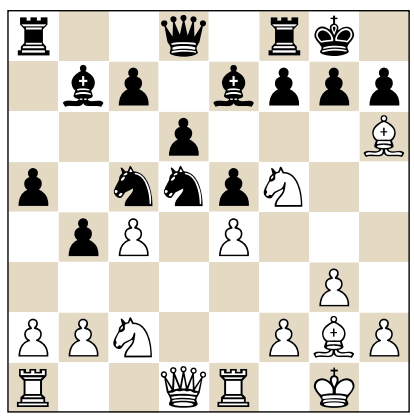
White has a pleasant edge due to his space advantage. A normal way would be to consolidate and then either start a pawn advance on the kingside or undermine the black queenside. Magnus, however, goes for the maximum result, even though it involves a pawn sacrifice, turning a safe edge into a complex one.

14.♗g5!?



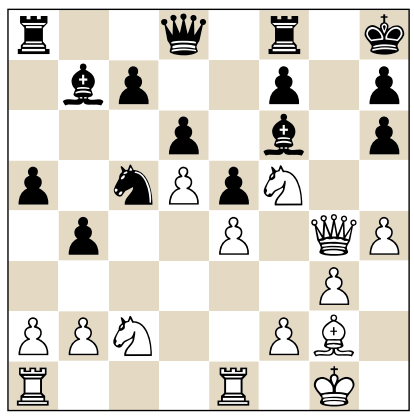
14...♘xd5!? Picking up the gauntlet. It's tempting, as after the solid 14...♗c8 15.♘ce3 h6 16.♗h4!? Magnus's aggressive concept keeps the knight on f5 and the bishop on the diagonal. Give White a bit more time and Black's position will collapse, but with 16...♔h7 he creates the threat of ...g5 by protecting h6. However, now 17.f4 works well for White, as even after the solid 17...♗xf5 (17...♘g8 18.♘xe7 ♘xe7 19.f5 is similar) 18.♘xf5 ♘g8 19.♘xe7 ♘xe7 20.f5, despite the closed character of the position and the fact that Black has rid himself of his bad bishop, the bishop pair and the extra space that White enjoys outweigh the excellent position of the c5-knight: 20...g5!? – this would be good for Black if White were forced to take en passant, but 21.♗xg5! hxg5 22.♕h5+ gives him a dominating attack.

15.♗h6!



The point, making move 14 a sacrifice and not a blunder.

15...gxh6 16.♕g4+ ♗g5 17.cxd5 ♔h8 18.h4 ♗f6



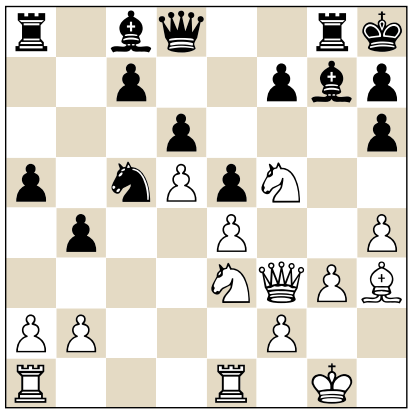
19.♘ce3

The computers love 19.♘xh6!?, of course, and they have a point. As in the note to move 5, even crippled doubled flank pawns have relevance. Still, Magnus's concept has a very human touch, aiming for total domination of the white squares instead of caring about minor material considerations.

19...♗c8 20.♕f3 ♗g7 21.♗h3 ♖g8

While the engines think that Magnus has lost touch, the black position, while looking solid, is pretty sad and without any prospects. Now 22.♔h2,

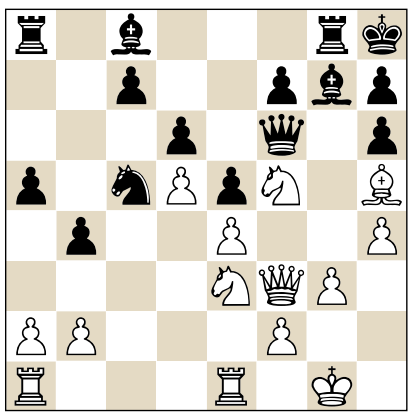
intending to exchange the white-squared bishops at some point, seems a safe option, but he goes for a more ambitious continuation.



22.♗g4!? ♕f6

More active than 22...♕f8, which would, however, have shielded the queen from any ♘g4 threats. Even so, White's edge is considerable.

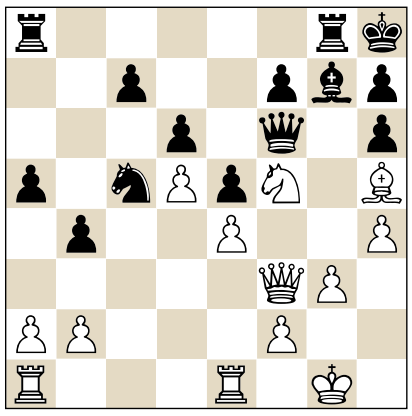
23.♗h5



23...♗xf5!?

This move is in many ways anti-positional, as it completely surrenders the f5-square. But he has a very concrete idea of counterplay in mind instead of just being passive in what would be a really unpleasant defence against White slowly improving his position.

24.♘xf5

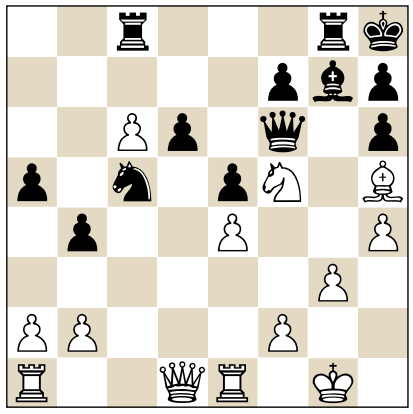


NEW IN CHESS

Wherever he went, Magnus Carlsen was closely followed by his personal bodyguard.

24...c6!? Here 24...♗f8 25.♖ac1 is an extra pawn for Black, with no fatal weaknesses in his position. Even so Black is extremely passive and White will double on the c-file and then have the option of opening the position on either flank while Black remains a very passive bystander.

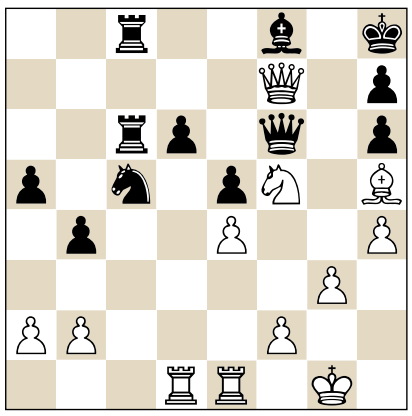
25.dxc6 ♖ac8 26.♕d1



26...♖xc6

As on move 14, it almost looks as if Magnus has blundered a pawn after 26...♘xe4!?, but 27.♗g4! protects the knight on f5, threatening to take the knight on e4, as well as to go ♘xg7 and ♗xc8, winning an exchange.

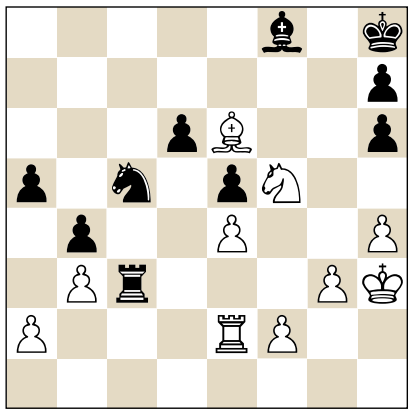
27.♕d5 ♖gc8 28.♖ad1 ♗f8 29.♕xf7



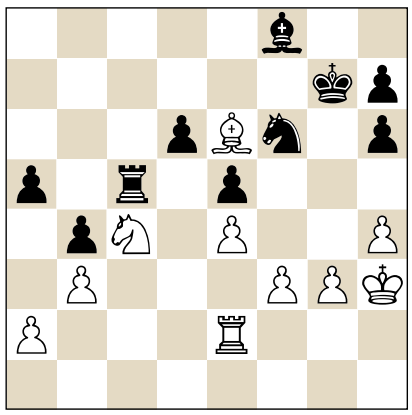
Not really ideal, since Black now gets real chances of putting up serious resistance. With the queens gone and with opposite-coloured bishops White has a huge positional advantage, but Black is getting close to setting up a fortress.

29...♕xf7 30.♗xf7 ♘a4 31.♖e2 ♖c1 32.♖xc1 ♖xc1+ 33.♔g2 ♘c5 34.b3 ♖c3 35.♔h3 ♘d7 36.♗e6 ♘c5

Maxime's idea is becoming clear. This is how he intends to sit out the rest of the game, challenging White to find a way through. And while Magnus's position is indeed beautiful, any pawn break will spoil his edge considerably. So, for a start he will have to tread water in order to pass the first time-control.

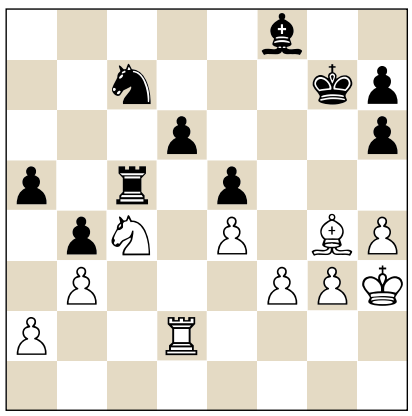


37.♗d5 ♘d7 38.♘e3 ♘f6 39.♗e6 ♖c5 40.♘c4 ♔g7 41.f3



The first step. The black rook is now passive on c5, allowing f3 to protect e4 and allowing White to get ready to attack d6 with the rook.

41...♘e8 42.♖d2 ♘c7 43.♗g4



46.♗d7! ♖c2 47.♗c6 ♖xa2 48.♖d7+ ♔f6 49.♖xc7 ♖c2

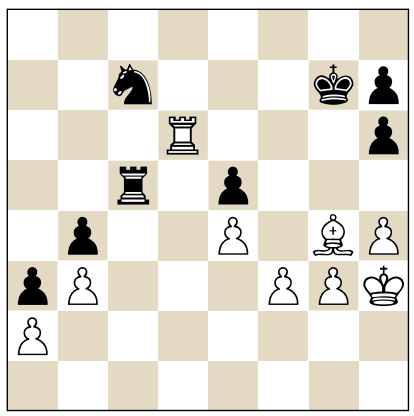
Pinning the bishop. Since the obvious freeing manoeuvre ♖c8 and ♗b7/d7 clearly loses on account of the passed black a-pawn, White has to aim for more drastic measures.

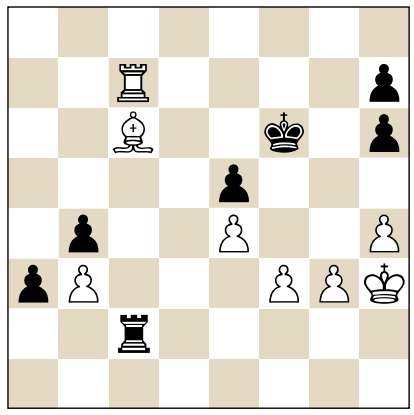
43...a4!?

After 43...♘e8, 44.♗d7! pokes the knight to f6, winning/losing a tempo and breaking the black fortress, as after 44...♘f6 45.♗e6 ♘e8, 46.♖d5! is decisive, since the pawn on a5 will drop. Now 46...♖xc4!? 47.bxc4 ♘c7 48.♖xa5! ♘xe6 49.♖b5 is just as hopeless, because once the b-pawn has dropped the white a-pawn will soon win the game.

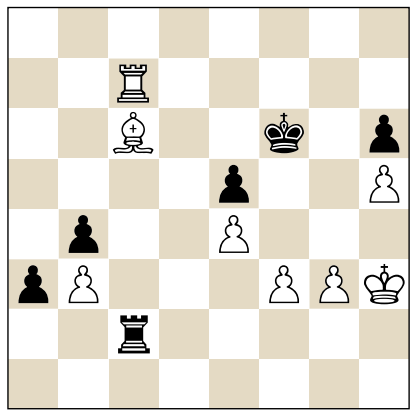
44.♘xd6 ♗xd6 45.♖xd6 a3

Maxime cleverly creates counterplay against a2, very likely inspired by the famous game Beliavsky-Dolmatov, Minsk 1979 (0-1), known from Dvoretsky's excellent series. Magnus thought for a while, and instead of trying to consolidate, which would be tempting in an almost winning position, he trusted his calculations.

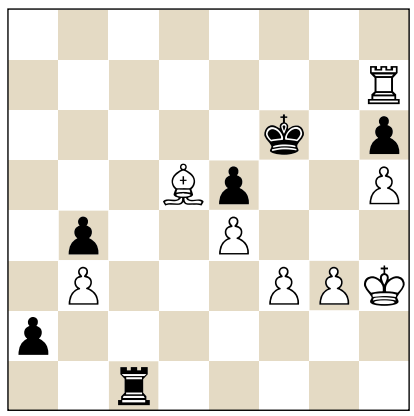




50.♖xh7! ♔g6 Because 50...♖xc6 51.♖xh6+, followed by 52.♖xc6, just wins the rook. **51.♖c7 ♔f6 52.h5**



52...♖c1!? Whereas 52...a2 53.♖a7 leads to a completely lost rook ending, White now has to prove his point, as the pin is still there and Black is threatening ...a2-a1♕. **53.♖h7! a2 54.♗d5**



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Black resigned. If Black queens, White mates by either the immediate 55.♖f7+ ♔g5 56.♖f5 mate, or even 55.♔g4!?, when after 55...♖c7!? 56.♖xc7 ♕a7!?, instead of taking the queen, with stalemate, both 57.♖b7 and 57.♖f7+ will suffice.

Maxime was not happy with the outcome of the game, of course, but at the press conference he made no secret of the fact that he, too, had enjoyed the creativity started as early as move 2!

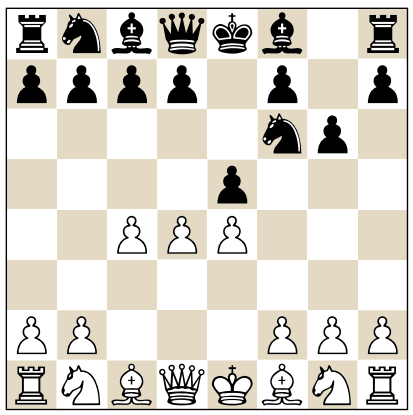
NOTES BY
Wesley So

EO 62.3 – A10
Wesley So
Anish Giri
Shamkir 2015 (1)

Azerbaijan! The name is exotic and sounds like a place in a book or a movie. The people have fierce eyes but are extremely friendly and curious about tourists. Most of the people working with the chess event spoke perfect English, but the village people, our drivers and bodyguards didn't. Yet these people would talk to me in Azeri anyway and try to make themselves understood. I would answer back in English trying to make myself understood. We would laugh, nod and smile and everyone seemed to get a little something from the 'conversation'. OK, maybe my adjustment was helped a bit by the Filipinos (yes, we are everywhere) who worked in the hotel. They explained a lot of things to me, telling me that not many foreigners visit Shamkir, preferring to explore the larger cities like Ganja and Baku, so the Shamkirites are always excited to see tourists. Anyway, if you make it this far, this little town is an attractive, quiet, very clean place to base yourself. Yes, I was pretty excited to be in Azerbaijan, except for one dark cloud on my horizon. My first game was against Anish Giri. Anish Giri has always been a tough opponent for me. In previous games when he was White he crushed me twice with 1.c4, so I figured that for this game it was the way to go.

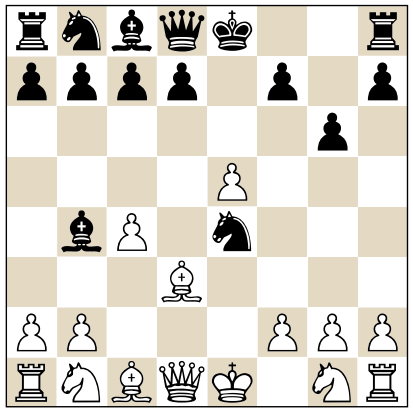
1.c4 g6 This is a favourite move by Grünfeld players hoping for a transposition to their favourite opening after 2.d4 ♘f6.

2.e4 e5 3.d4 ♘f6



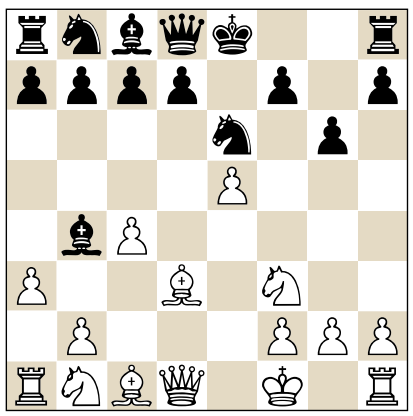
4.dxe5 The main move is 4.♘f3, but this looks very logical as well.

4...♘xe4 5.♗d3 ♗b4+?! This is the obvious reply, but it's a mistake that led to a difficult position for Black.



6.♔f1! I have beaten Baadur Jobava before, when I moved my king to f1 on the 5th move: 1.d4 e6 2.c4 b6 3.e4 ♗b7 4.♗d3 ♗b4+ 5.♔f1!, and I had nice memories about that game: 1-0 (37) So-Jobava, Bergamo 2014.

6...♘c5 7.♘f3 ♘e6 8.a3?!



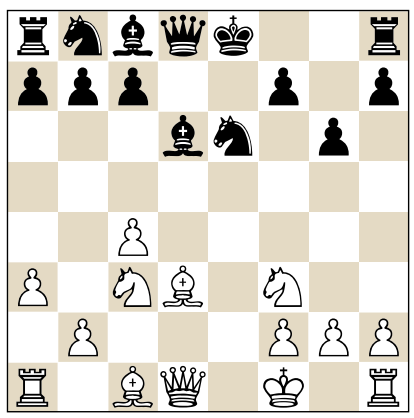
Small mistakes like this one are unavoidable, but both 8.♗h6 and 8.h4 would have been better.

8...♗e7

Black would have equalized if he had gone 8...♗f8!. Next comes ...♗g7, followed by ...♘c6, with pressure on the e-pawn.

I actually saw this move when I played 8.a3 and I was waiting impatiently for Anish's reply. I didn't have to wait long, as he soon picked up his bishop and put it on e7.

9.♘c3 d6 10.exd6 ♗xd6



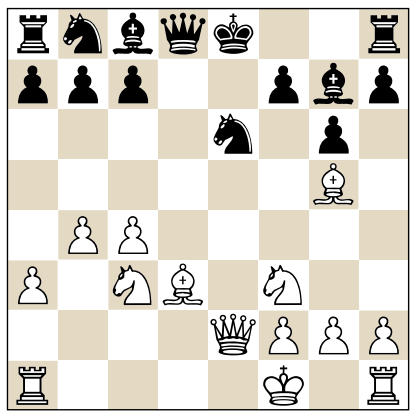
11.b4

11.h4 is a faster way to attack the black king.

11...♗f8

Black has to send the bishop back to g7 to fight for the long diagonal. 11...0-0 12.♗b2 gives White an edge.

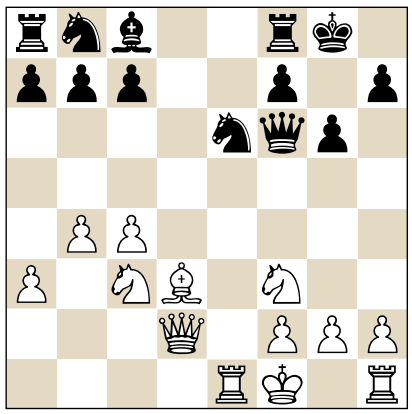
12.♕e2 ♗g7 13.♗g5



13...♗f6

After 13...f6 Anish didn't like 14.♖d1 fxg5 15.♗xg6+ hxg6 16.♖xd8+ ♔xd8, and here he pointed out 17.♘xg5! ♘xg5 18.♕d2+ ♔e8 19.♕xg5 ♗xc3 20.♕e3+, after which White's queen is stronger than the pieces, as the black king is vulnerable.

14.♗xf6 ♕xf6 15.♕d2 15.♖c1 is inferior. **15...0-0 16.♖e1**



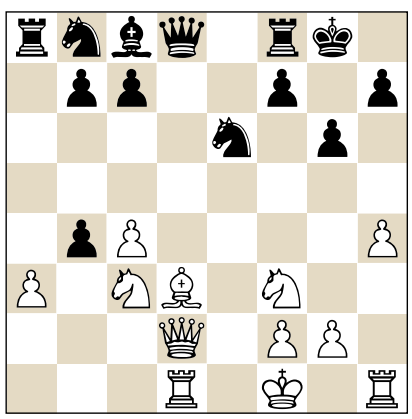
The white rook enjoys the open file very much, while its counterpart will find employment after h2-h4.

16...♕d8

After 16...♕f4 White plays 17.♖e3.

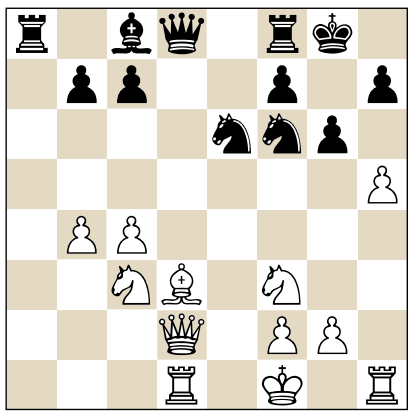
17.♖d1 Preventing ...♘f4. Anish said after the game that Black's position here is very difficult.

17...a5 18.h4 axb4



19.axb4 Also very good is 19.♘d5, with the deadly idea of ♕h6 plus ♘g5 and mate. I saw this during the game, but wasn't completely sure of the complications. Anyway there is no need to hurry.

19...♘d7 20.h5 ♘f6 On 20...g5 21.♗f5 is very good for White.

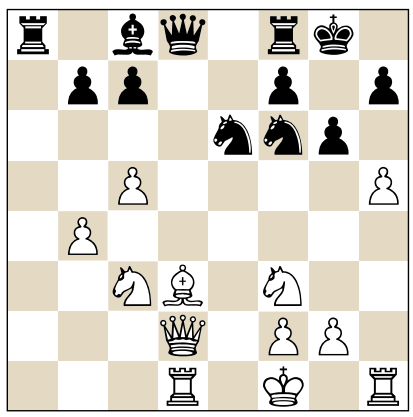


NEW IN CHESS

On the free day the players visited Shamkir's splendid chess club. If he won quickly, Wesley So immediately offered his opponents another game.

21.c5

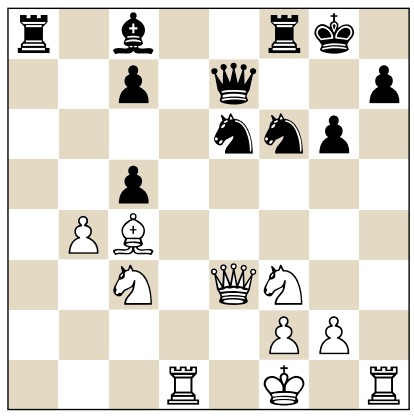
White would have won simply after 21.♕c1. The point is the black queen simply doesn't have a hiding place: 21...♕e7 (21...♗d7 is met by 22.♘e5) 22.♘d5 ♘xd5 23.cxd5 ♘g7, and now White chases the queen again: 24.♖e1 ♕xb4 (24...♕d7 25.♘e5) 25.hxg6 fxg6 26.♕h6, and it's more than over.



21...b6 Black's best chance might be 21...♘xh5. Now White has to sacrifice more material: 22.♖xh5! (22.♕h6 ♖a1! allows Black to escape) 22...gxh5 23.♕h6 f5 24.♗xf5 ♕xd1+ (he has to sacrifice the queen as 24...♕e7 25.♘d5 would be very bad) 25.♘xd1 ♖xf5 26.♘e3 ♖a1+ 27.♘e1 ♖f7 28.♕xh5 ♘g7 29.♕e5, and White is much better, as his queen and knight are very actively placed.

22.hxg6 Not allowing Black the opportunity to take on h5 again.

22...fxg6 23.♕e3 ♕e7 24.♗c4 bxc5

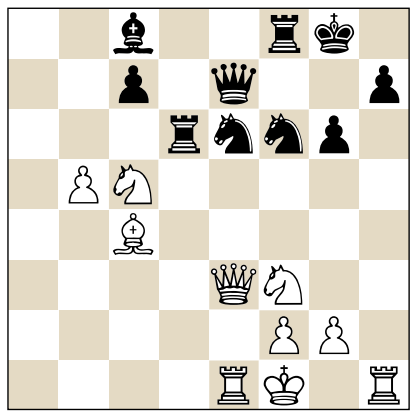


25.b5 25.♘g5? ♘g4 would suddenly turn the tables.

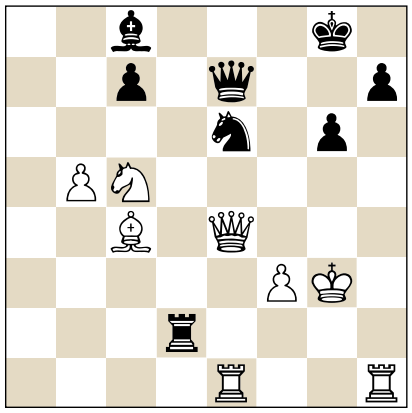
25...♖b8

Anish started using up a lot of his time, but there was no adequate defence. 25...c6 26.bxc6 ♗a6 would be more stubborn but still very hard to defend after 27.♘b5.

26.♖e1 ♖b6 27.♘a4 ♖d6 28.♘xc5



28...♘g4
28...♘d5 29.♗xd5 ♖xd5 30.♘xe6 would leave me a piece up.
29.♕e4 ♘xf2 30.♔xf2 ♖d2+ 31.♔g3 ♖xf3+ 32.gxf3

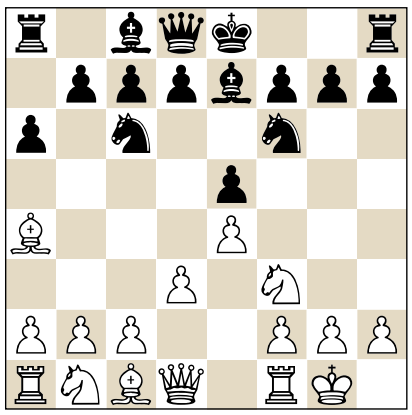


Anish resigned here, as after 32...♕g5+ 33.♕g4 ♕xc5 34.♗xe6+ ♔g7 35.♗xc8 h5 36.♕f4 ♕f2+ 37.♔h3 ♕g2+ 38.♔h4 ♕f2+ 39.♕g3 the checks quickly run out.

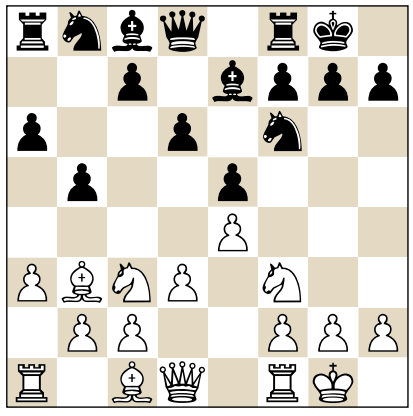
NOTES BY
Vishy Anand

RL 13.5 – C84
Vishy Anand
Wesley So
Shamkir 2015 (5)

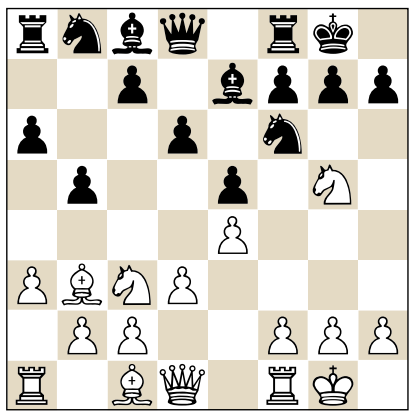
Wesley had been dominating the event so far and was leading with 3½/4.
1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♘f6 5.0-0 ♗e7 6.d3
In the first round I had played 6.♖e1 against Carlsen here, but I hoped to try a specific idea today.



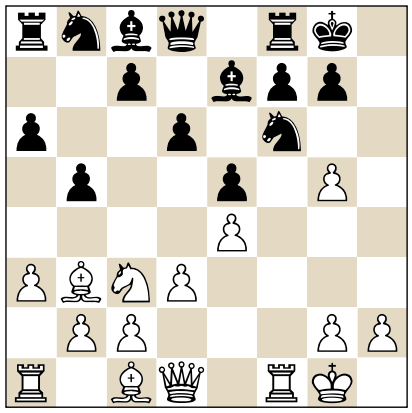
6...b5 7.♗b3 0-0 8.♘c3 d6 9.a3 ♘b8 Wesley had played this against Caruana in Wijk aan Zee earlier this year and drew comfortably.



10.♘g5!? And this is it. My second Grzegorz Gajewski had found it and we looked at it in detail in Shamkir, as there was some hope that Wesley would repeat the way he played against Caruana. The text looked more promising to me than 10.a4 b4 11.♘d5 ♘xd5 12.♗xd5 c6 13.♗b3 ♘d7 14.d4 a5, as in the game Caruana-So.

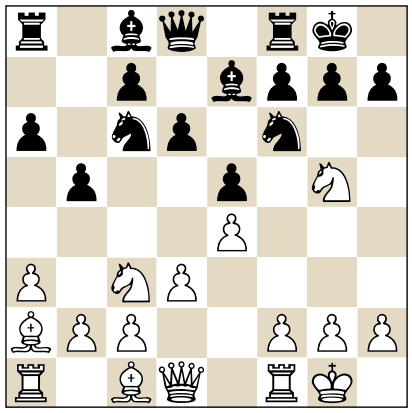


10...♘c6
Before the game Gajewski had told me that this was possible, but that it would be hard to find it over the board! So, I was quite impressed that he opted for exactly that. Black simply heads for the d4-square, which is now unguarded.
Also perfectly playable is 10...h6, when 11.f4! was Gajewski's idea, which prompted us to go for the line: 11...exf4 12.♘f3 g5 (everything like in the King's Gambit, and White reacts in similar fashion) 13.g3 fxg3 (13...♗h3 14.gxf4 ♗xf1 15.♕xf1) 14.h4!, and White has good compensation.
After 11...hxg5 (instead of 11...exf4) 12.fxg5 a sample line could go:

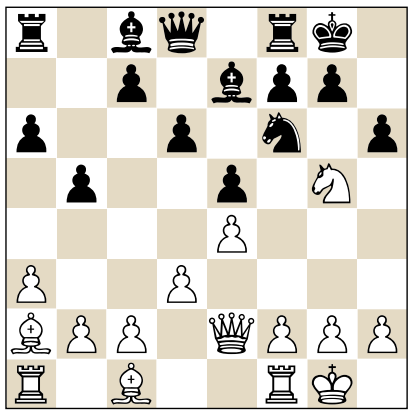


ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

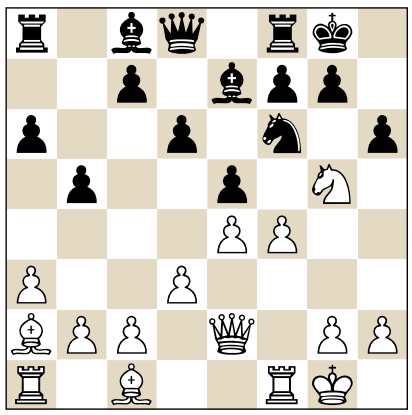
12...♘g4! (as 12...♗g4 13.♕e1 ♘fd7 14.♕h4 ♗e6 15.♖f3 wins for White) 13.g6 (13.h3 is also playable) 13...d5! 14.♔h1 ♗c5 15.♕e1 ♕d6 16.♗xd5 ♕xg6 17.♗xa8 ♘xh2 18.♔xh2 ♕h5+ 19.♔g3 g5 (or 19...♕g4+ 20.♔h2 ♕h5+, with a perpetual) 20.♖h1! ♕g4+ 21.♔h2 ♕h5+, with a draw.
11.♗a2 Getting out of the way. 11.f4?! ♘d4 12.♗a2 ♗g4 13.♕d2 h6 is fine for Black.



11...♘d4 After 11...h6 12.♘f3!? in effect ...h6 and ♗a2 have been inserted instead of ...♘b8, which should be helpful for White. **12.♘e2** The point of 11.♗a2. **12...♘xe2+** In case of 12...c5 13.♘xd4, after both 13...exd4 and 13...cxd4, White will go 14.f4.
13.♕xe2 h6!



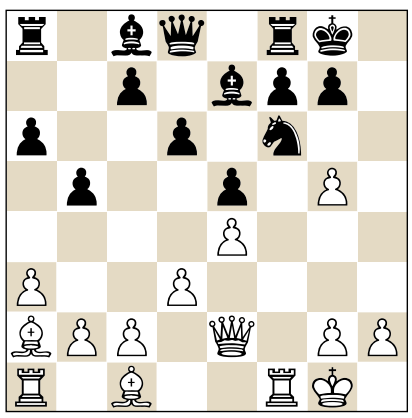
14.f4!? Continuing with the same idea, although I did spend a lot of time here.



14...hxg5

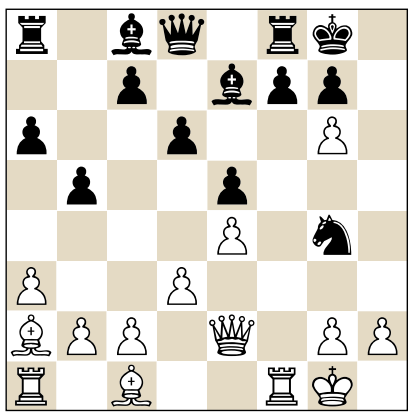
I had concentrated on this move. However, 14...exf4! is a better version for Black, although White continues as before: 15.♘f3 g5 (now the ♕e2 turns out to be misplaced) 16.g3 (16.h4 is strongly met by 16...♘h5!) 16...fxg3 17.h4 (17.hxg3 d5 is slightly better for Black; 17.♘d4 runs into 17...d5!) 17...♗h3 18.hxg5 ♘g4, with counterplay.

15.fxg5

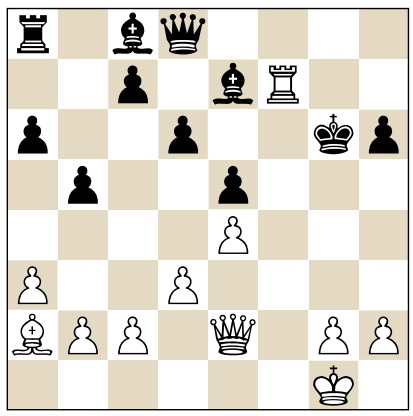


15...♘g4 Here 15...♗g4!? 16.♕f2 ♘h7 17.♗xf7+ ♔h8 18.♕h4 ♖xf7 19.♖xf7 ♗e6 is about equal.

16.g6



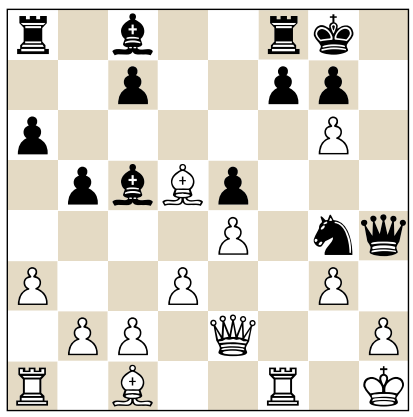
16...♗g5?! This gives White chances. 16...♘h6! just holds, but is not easy to find over the board: 17.♗xh6 (during the game I thought 17.h3 was quite good, but after 17...♗e6 – I had seen 17...♗g5 18.♕h5 ♗xc1 19.♗xf7+ ♔h8 20.♖axc1, and Black cannot stop g4-g5 – 18.gxf7+ ♗xf7 19.♗xh6 ♗xa2 Black defends; 17.♖xf7 ♖xf7 18.♗xf7+ ♘xf7 19.♕h5 ♗e6 wins for Black) 17...gxh6 18.♖xf7 ♖xf7 19.♖f1 ♔g7 20.♖xf7+ ♔xg6, and surprisingly there is nothing more than a perpetual:



ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

21.♕f3 h5 22.♖f5 ♗xf5 23.♕xf5+ ♔g7 24.♗f7 ♕f8 25.♕g6+ ♔h8 26.♕xh5+ ♔g7.

16...d5 also holds: 17.♗xd5 ♗c5+ 18.♔h1 ♕h4 19.g3, and now:



ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

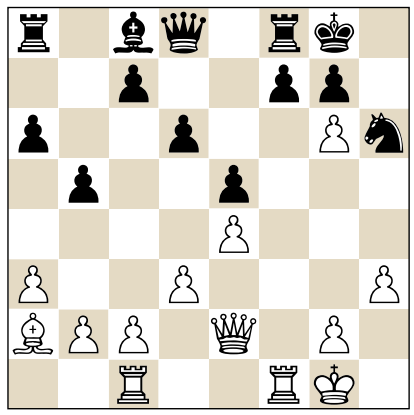
19...♕h5! (not the easiest line to spot. When I got back to my room, the computer showed it. During the game I had looked at 19...♕h3, which loses after 20.gxf7+ ♔h8 21.♗xa8 ♘xh2 22.♕xh2) 20.♗xa8 ♗e6 21.♗d5 ♗xd5 22.exd5 ♗f2! 23.♖xf2 ♘xf2+ 24.♕xf2 ♕d1+ 25.♕g1 ♕f3+, with a draw.

17.h3!

The point is that if I go ♕h5, Black should not have ...♗g4 in reply.

17.♗xf7+ ♖xf7! (17...♔h8 18.h3 ♘h6 19.♕h5, and White gets a much better version than in the game) 18.♖xf7 (18.gxf7+ ♔f8 19.h3 ♗xc1 20.♖axc1 ♘f6) 18...♗e6 seems fine for Black.

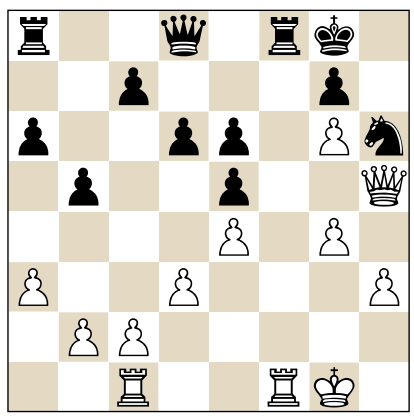
17...♗xc1 18.♖axc1 ♘h6



19.♕h5

I should have played 19.♖xf7!, which maybe gives White some hope: 19...♖xf7 20.gxf7+ ♔f8 21.♕h5, followed by ♖f1 and ♕g6.

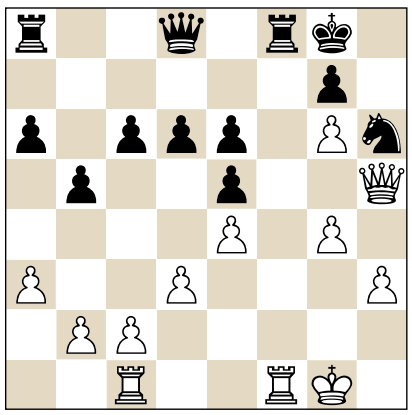
19...♗e6 20.♗xe6 fxe6 21.g4



21...c6?!

This is dubious, as is 21...♕e7, which transposes to the game: 22.g5 ♖xf1+ 23.♖xf1 ♖f8 24.gxh6 ♖xf1+ 25.♔xf1 ♕f8+ 26.♔e2 gxh6 27.♕g4 ♕f6 28.h4, and it looks better for White, although it will be difficult to prove.

Clearly preferable for Black was to sit tight with 21...♖f4! 22.g5 ♕f8 23.♔g2 ♖e8. It may be difficult to break this, e.g. 24.♖xf4 exf4 25.♖g1 e5 26.♔f3 ♖e7, and I don't see how White can make progress. Black can play ...c5 and just float around on the seventh rank.

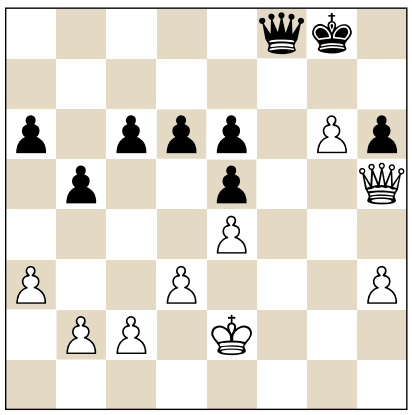


22.♖xf8+?

If I'd been asked at the press conference, I would have said this was a great move. It was only after realizing that the queen ending isn't as good for White as I thought during the game, that I understood this was a mistake.

The stronger move was 22.g5! ♕b6+ (22...♖f4 loses to 23.gxh6 ♖h4 24.h7+ ♔h8 25.♖f8+ ♕xf8 26.♕xh4, and the buried king on h8 seals Black's fate) 23.♔g2 ♖xf1 (23...♕e3 hits on 24.♖ce1! ♕d2+ 25.♖e2, driving away the queen from the c1-h6 diagonal, after which White wins) 24.♖xf1 ♕e3 25.gxh6 ♕xh6 26.♕xh6 gxh6 27.♖f7 ♖f8 28.♖c7, and in this rook ending I will collect a couple of pawns on the queenside, he will collect the one on g6, and it's very bad for Black.

22...♕xf8 23.♖f1 ♕e7 24.g5 ♖f8 25.gxh6 ♖xf1+ 26.♔xf1 ♕f8+ 27.♔e2 gxh6



Here I felt very confident. The plan is to move my h-pawn to h5 and then win somehow. That somehow turned out to be less clear than I had thought.

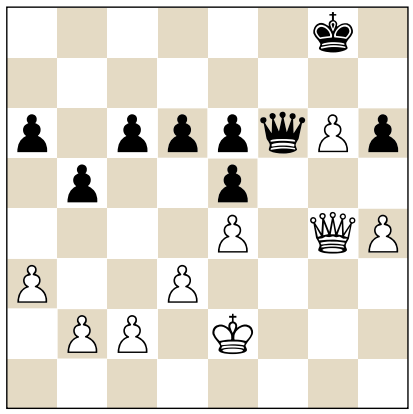
28.♕g4

28.b4 ♕f4 is what White should avoid.

NEW IN CHESS

At the press conference the result hardly seemed to matter anymore, as Wesley So and Vishy Anand became fascinated again by the marvellously complex game they had just played.

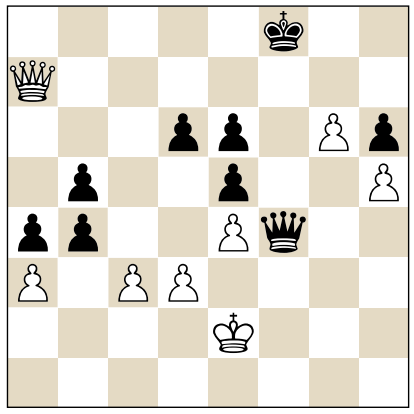
28...♕f6 29.h4



29...d5? I had originally thought that Black's final mistake had come earlier, but this is the real blunder. After this Black loses the resource ...♕f6-f4.

After 29...a5 the win is no longer evident: 30.h5 a4!, taking away the b3-square. Now White's king cannot run away from Black checks after he's played c3:

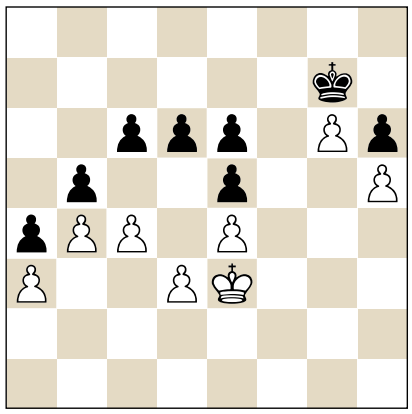
– 31.b4 (White waits for one more move and creates a safe spot for his king on b2) 31...c5 (31...♔g7 32.♕g1! was the point of White's wait) 32.c3 ♔g7 (32...cxb4? is premature because of 33.cxb4 ♔g7 34.♕g1!) 33.♕g3 cxb4 34.♕e3 ♕f4! 35.♕a7+ ♔f8, and White cannot improve:



ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

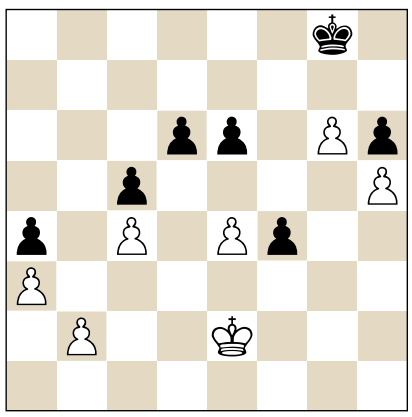
36.cxb4 ♕g4+ 37.♔d2 ♕g5+ 38.♔c2 ♕g2+ 39.♔c3 ♕f1! 40.♕b8+ ♔e7 with a draw.

– 31.♕f3 ♕f4 32.b4 (this is a good try, but now Black can even swap queens: 32.♕h3 ♔g7 33.b3 (33.♕xe6 ♕h2+) 33...♕c1!, and Black draws; 32.♕xf4 exf4 33.d4 (33.b4 e5) 33...e5 34.d5 cxd5 35.exd5 e4, and this pawn ending is a draw, since here White cannot play 36.b3? because of 36...b4!, after which Black wins) 32...♕xf3+ (and not 32...♕h2+? 33.♔e3! ♕g1+ 34.♔d2 ♕g5+ 35.♔c3 ♕f4 36.♕h3! ♕f6 37.♕e3, and White breaks through) 33.♔xf3 ♔g7 34.c4 ♔f6 35.♔e3 ♔g7



ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

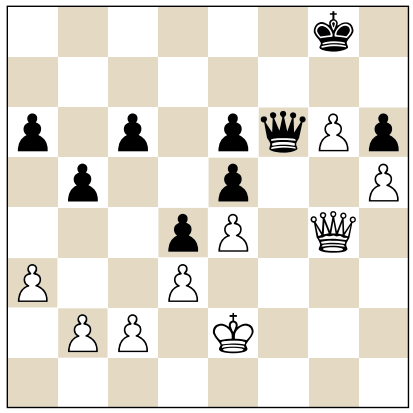
and although the black king is tied to the g6-pawn, White cannot win because his king has no entry squares.
– Another try is 31.c4 bxc4 (31...♔g7? fails to 32.cxb5 cxb5 33.♕g1!, and Black is lost) 32.dxc4 c5 33.♕f3 ♕f4! 34.♕xf4 exf4



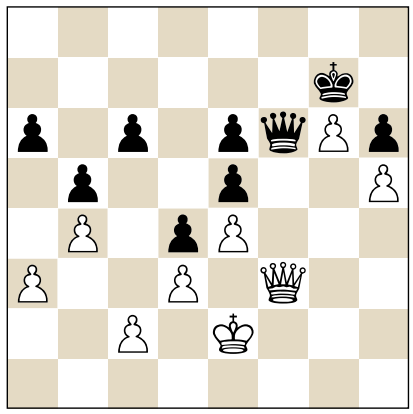
ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

and now White's king is tied down to the f-pawn and cannot help with b2-b3.
– And finally there is 31.♕g1 ♕h4 32.♕a7 ♕xh5+ 33.♔d2 ♕xg6 34.♕b8+ ♔f7 35.♕xd6 ♕g3!, and the game will end in a perpetual.

30.h5 Even faster was 30.exd5! cxd5 31.h5. **30...d4**

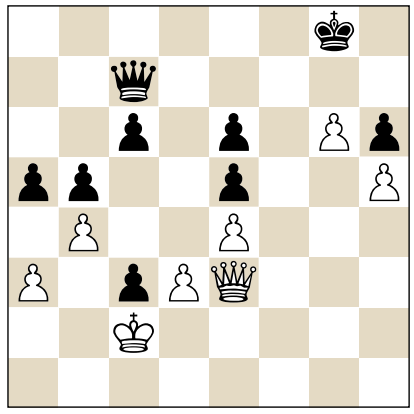


Here I took stock: White is simply winning and just has to be careful.
31.b4! Pinning down the queenside.
31...♔g7 32.♕f3

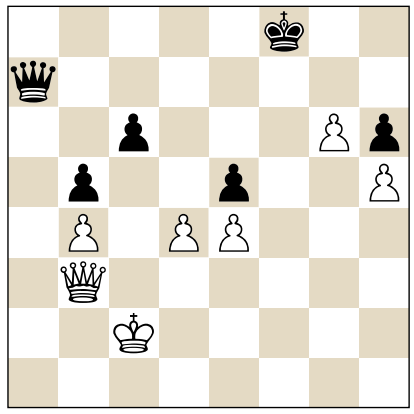


32...♕e7 The queen is pushed back. The queen swap 32...♕xf3+ 33.♔xf3 loses after 33...♔f6 34.♔e2 ♔g7 35.♔d2 ♔f6 36.c3!, and now both 36...dxc3+ 37.♔xc3 ♔g7 38.d4 and 36...♔g7 37.cxd4 exd4 38.e5 win for White.
And Black cannot play 32...♕f4 either because of 33.♕xf4 exf4 34.e5, and White wins.

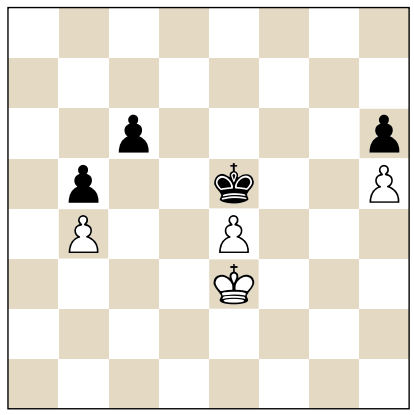
33.♔d1 ♔g8 34.♕f2 ♔g7 35.c3 dxc3 36.♔c2 ♕c7 37.♕c5 ♔g8 38.♕e3 a5



39.♕h3
39.♕xh6 axb4 40.axb4 ♕a7 41.♕c1 also wins, but it is messier than the game continuation and unnecessary.
39...axb4 40.♕xe6+ ♔f8 41.axb4 ♕a7 42.♔xc3 ♕a3+ 43.♔c2 ♕a4+ 44.♕b3 ♕a7 45.d4



Black resigned in view of 45...exd4 46.♔d3 ♔g7 47.♕f7+ ♕xf7 48.gxf7 ♔xf7 49.♔xd4, winning, or 45...♔g7 46.♕f7+ ♕xf7 47.gxf7 ♔xf7 48.dxe5 ♔e6 49.♔d3 ♔xe5 50.♔e3



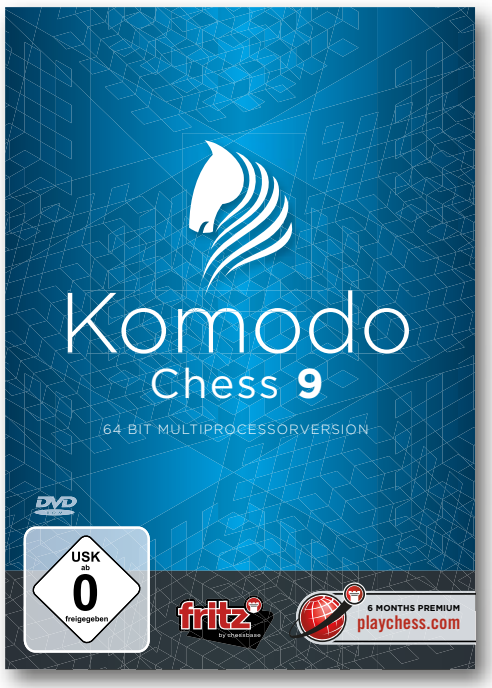
ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

and this king and pawn ending is a trivial win. ■

Shamkir 2015 — **cat. XXI**

					1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		TPR
1	Magnus Carlsen	IGM	NOR	2863	*	½	1	½	1	1	½	1	½	1	7	2984
2	Vishy Anand	IGM	IND	2791	½	*	½	1	½	1	½	½	1	½	6	2897
3	Fabiano Caruana	IGM	ITA	2802	0	½	*	1	1	½	½	½	½	½	5	2814
4	Wesley So	IGM	USA	2788	½	0	0	*	½	½	1	½	1	1	5	2815
5	Vladimir Kramnik	IGM	RUS	2783	0	½	0	½	*	0	½	1	1	½	4	2730
6	Shakhriyar Mamedyarov	IGM	AZE	2756	0	0	½	½	1	*	½	½	½	½	4	2733
7	Anish Giri	IGM	NED	2790	½	½	½	0	½	½	*	½	0	½	3½	2692
8	Maxime Vachier-Lagrave	IGM	FRA	2765	0	½	½	½	0	½	½	*	½	½	3½	2695
9	Michael Adams	IGM	ENG	2745	½	0	½	0	0	½	1	½	*	½	3½	2697
10	Rauf Mamedov	IGM	AZE	2658	0	½	½	0	½	½	½	½	½	*	3½	2707

NEW!



Faster, smarter, stronger. These three words summarize its evolution, as the new Komodo 9 runs even faster on multi-processors, uses all the software speeds gained to add more knowledge, and defeats previous number ones by unheard of scores.

Komodo is a chess program that is different from the rest. Its search makes greater use of extensions than any other top engine, which allows Komodo to often see deeper than the others, even if it is displaying a slightly lower search depth. The evaluation differs from its main rivals because it represents a blend of both automated tuning and the judgment of a grandmaster and computer expert (Larry Kaufman). Fully automated evaluations are subject to rather large sample error, and applying some chess judgment is beneficial, both in results and in the reasonableness of reported evaluations.

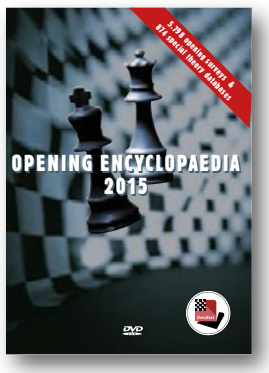
Komodo is primarily known for superb positional play. Of course it is also one of the the top few engines in tactical strength, but the programmers have not been willing to sacrifice positional play just to score better on tactical problem sets. All good engines are far stronger tactically than any human player, but when positional judgment is involved, top grandmasters are still superior. Therefore it makes sense to emphasize positional play rather than tactical skill; it is better to improve one's weakest point rather than just to further improve the strongest feature.

Komodo is especially useful for opening analysis, because its grandmaster programmer has always made sure that the program's evaluations agree in general with accepted theory. Komodo also excels in the evaluation of positions with material imbalance, which it handles more correctly than other top engines. The endgame of Komodo has been improved by the use of Syzygy tablebases, which provide only the most essential information to save time and memory.

Komodo Chess 9 79,90 €

Update from Komodo Chess 8 39,90 €

Opening Encyclopedia 2015



The new ChessBase Opening Encyclopedia 2015 is an excellent tool to close holes in your repertoire or to add new ideas, traps, or lines to your repertoire. There are more games and more annotated games than ever – 83,500 of the 5.3 million games are annotated. Among the top commentators are: Vishy Anand, Levon Aronian, Magnus Carlsen, Fabiano Caruana, Pavel Eljanov, Sergei Karjakin, Vladimir Kramnik, Boris Gelfand, Peter Leko, Teymour Radjabov, to name just a few! On top of that the Opening Encyclopedia 2015 offers a unique collection of all 874 ChessBase Magazine opening surveys up to CBM #164. This collection created by masters is particularly helpful for club players because these surveys give easy and fast access to the openings and their current theory. The surveys first give a written overview of the most important moves and then illustrates the ideas with annotated master games. The ChessBase Opening Encyclopedia 2015 also offers a clear and comprehensive access to opening knowledge: for each of the 500 openings covered by the international ECO standard key there is at least one opening survey, by now almost 5,800. Many of the authors are renowned opening specialists and have been analysing the development of their lines for many years, e.g. for the ChessBase Magazine. Among them are many well-known theoreticians such as Avrukh, Grivas, Krasenkow, Kritz, Kuzmin, Marin, Moskalenko, Postny, Ribli, Rogozenco, Stohl etc.

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A Beautiful Minefield

'The female brain is predominantly hard-wired for empathy, and … the male brain is predominantly hard-wired for understanding and building systems' – Simon Baron-Cohen, Professor of Developmental Psychopathology at the University of Cambridge, and Fellow of the British Academy.

In New In Chess 2015/2, I wrote an article, 'Vive la Différence' on the subject of women in chess. With a sprinkling of perspicacity, I correctly divined that the topic would prove controversial, although not at all for the reasons I imagined. Indeed, in the first few weeks following publication, the only feedback I received concerned my searing attack on the grandmistress of self-aggrandisement, Susan Polgar, whose highly implausible claim to have broken the world record for playing the most opponents simultaneously I called directly into question. While, predictably, this provoked a barrage of ad hominem barbs in response from Susan Polgar Inc., the one thing that has been conspicuously absent, as the chess historian Edward Winter dryly noted, has been any attempt to rebut my points. Without independent, verifiable evidence to support her claim, the alleged world record of the elder Polgar must be dismissed as a blatant deceit.

Somewhat naively – probably on account of my low EQ – I expected that this would comprise the full extent of any potential discord, as the rest of my article, on the differences in playing strength between men and women, was written in a subdued and uncharacteristically understated manner. I was very mistaken. On the 20th April an article appeared in *The Daily Telegraph* entitled 'Nigel Short: Girls Just Don't Have the Brains to Play Chess'. Never mind the fact I didn't say that, it was a catchy headline to set me up as a misogynist pantomime villain. In extraordinary rapid succession came a whole series of similar articles, in *The Guardian*, *The Times*, *The Independent*, many with totally fabricated quotes and grotesque distortions – such as the *Daily Mail*'s 'Women aren't smart enough to play chess because the game requires logical thinking, says British Grandmaster', despite me having said nothing at all about logic. The story quickly spread throughout the world. Articles swiftly appeared in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The New Zealand Herald*, *Der Spiegel*, *Time*, and *The Huffington Post*. I was interviewed for *Sky News* and for *CNN Sport*. The subject was discussed on Indian TV; I was called a 'jerk' on *Fox*, and was repeatedly called a 'twat' by one female presenter in New Zealand. And this was just the tip of the iceberg: I simply couldn't keep track of the countless dozens, or hundreds, of other articles in Canada, Ireland, Spain, and elsewhere.

What was very clear about this media frenzy is that hardly any journalists, apart from *The Telegraph*'s Leon Watson, who broke the story, had actually read my original piece. Furthermore, I would go so far as to state that various members of this honourable profession wilfully misrepresented my views. The simple fact of the matter is that men play better chess than women. A quick glance at the top 100 reveals that only two of them are female (an historical high, incidentally). In August, that figure will drop to one when Judit Polgar disappears from the ranking list due to inactivity. Only a simpleton (and apparently there are a good many of those) would fallaciously argue that because Judit has a good personal score against me, that this somehow disproves the general point. The gender gap is enormous. The real question is 'Why?'

At no point in my article did I ever suggest that societal pressures, or overt and covert sexism, might not account for a large chunk of this disparity. Indeed, I strongly suspect they do. As an approximate means of gauging this, it would be an interesting area for future research to compare the chess gender gap in countries where women traditionally have low status – for example, for religious reasons – with the gender gap in more liberal countries where their status is ostensibly higher. My hypothesis is that there will be a statistically significant difference between the groups. Nevertheless, given the fact that in no single country in the world are women the chess equal (never mind superior) of men, my contention is that biology is the residual factor that cannot be glossed over, or ignored.

Men and women have such dissimilar brains it is implausible to expect their cognitive functions to be identical. For a start, men have roughly 6.5 times more grey matter; women have 9.5 times

> ‘Never mind the fact I didn’t say that, it was a catchy headline to set me up as a misogynist pantomime villain.’

more white matter. The latticework of synaptical connections between the two hemispheres is denser in females than in males. Sexual dimorphism is noticeable in the hippocampus, the hypothalamus and the amygdala. Male brains are also 10% larger on average (certain malicious editors cited this statement of fact as evidence of my sexism – pretending that I either don’t know or understand that it is closely correlated to body size). Indeed sex differences in the encephalon are observable even in foetuses, as early as 26 weeks. Circumstantial evidence suggests women are inherently less interested in the game. Given how early this divergence starts, the phenomenon is unlikely to be explained wholly by nurture. Aggression – essentially the effect of a sex hormone, testosterone, working on the mental organ – might be another factor giving men the edge. In most cases, biology is paramount.

This, then, is the nub of my argument: while it is difficult, or perhaps impossible, to define exactly which combination of attributes is necessary to become a strong chess player, the existence of fundamentally different cerebral structures between the sexes is, in my view, the ultimate irreducible obstacle to equality in this specific field. It is vital, however, to distinguish between the worthy attempt to scientifically identify and understand sex differences, and stereotyping. The former is useful, whereas the latter – assigning the general characteristics of a group to an individual – is potentially discriminatory and deeply damaging. The point is not that women are incapable of playing good chess – because clearly some of them can – rather that they are less likely to do so, on average.

Depending on one’s political hue, the existence of separate competitions and inferior titles for women is evidence that the chess world is either irredeemably sexist, or that it has pragmatically acknowledged reality. My personal inclination would be to abolish honours on the grounds that they encourage women to aim too low, although this would undoubtedly cause howls of discontent from many (but by no means all) current and aspiring holders. Setting a higher benchmark would at least go some way to narrowing the ability chasm. Incidentally, while, since this topic went viral, we have heard plenty about the (very real) disadvantages under which women in chess labour, we have heard rather less about the advantages they enjoy: a male professional with an Elo rating of 2500, residing in an advanced economy, would be practically destitute if he would rely solely on playing as a means of livelihood, whereas an equivalent female – while never in the slightest danger of becoming affluent – can survive in tolerable comfort, thanks to additional opportunities and prizes.

The feminist lobby has become so tyrannical in its shrill orthodoxy, harping on about nurture over nature, sometimes almost to the point of denying the latter, that my innocent comment, in ‘Vive la Différence’, that my wife frequently asks me to reverse the car (uphill, at an angle) out of our narrow garage has been paraded as conclusive proof of sexism (perhaps it was just as well that I didn’t mention that my daughter also asks me to do the same). Nevertheless, whether one likes it or not, numerous studies show that men, on average, consistently outperform women in spatial tasks. In contrast, meta-analysis gives women the edge in verbal skills.

Society has, in other ways, thankfully become far more tolerant of diversity. For millennia homosexuals have been vilified, ostracised, imprisoned and sometimes even killed. As the recent referendum on gay marriage in Ireland shows, they are steadily being accorded more respect and legal rights. In 2008, scientists at the Karolinska Institute, in Sweden, demonstrated that the brain structure of gay men more closely resembled those of straight women than they did of straight men. Conversely, the brains of gay women are asymmetrical like those of heterosexual males. In other words, gays are not primarily attracted to their own sex out of upbringing, but are simply born that way. Their brains are ‘hard-wired’ differently, if you like (a convenient expression, notwithstanding the organ’s considerable plasticity). It would be fascinating to research whether gay males are under-represented in the upper echelons of chess. As I know of only one openly gay player in the top 100, I rather suspect they are, although one should bear in mind that, for obvious reasons, such as fear of ridicule or persecution, some are coy about revealing their own sexuality. Alas, further exploration of this beautiful minefield of a topic will have to wait for another day... ■

Nakamura and Krush, who else?

Their roads to glory were bumpier than the final standings may suggest, but even so the top-favourites in the U.S. Championships in St. Louis lived up to expectations. Despite some 'moronic' play, Hikaru Nakamura won his fourth title, while 'maybe the worst game ever to appear in New In Chess' did not stop Irina Krush from claiming her seventh title. **Alisa Melekhina** reports.

The 2015 U.S. Championship attracted two of the World's Top 10 players with the promise of a new rivalry. Hikaru Nakamura decided to accept his invitation after a two-year hiatus. The second seed was Wesley So, who recently switched his federation to the USA from the Philippines. So's preparation included swimming two miles a day to get into good physical shape. And talking about players who like to challenge Nakamura, 2014 U.S. Champion Gata Kamsky was also a top contender going in.

In addition, the championship was studded with a host of talented youths like Sam Shankland (23), who won an individual gold medal in the 2014 Olympiad, Ray Robson (20), now part of the formidable Webster University chess team, Kayden Troff (16), and America's youngest ever grandmaster, Sam Sevian (14). According to Sevian, 'Being young is always advantageous; it puts pressure on the older guys who simply don't like to lose to a kid.'

FM Alisa Melekhina has represented the U.S. since the age of 9 in numerous World Youth and Junior competitions. This was the seventh time she competed in the U.S. Women's Championship. Alisa is currently a corporate lawyer practicing in New York City in the fields of intellectual property and white-collar litigation at Debevoise & Plimpton LLP.

MIKE KLEIN

In case you've lost count, the Champions are happy to help. Hikaru Nakamura is now four-time U.S. Champion, Irina Krush won her seventh title.

On the Women's side, returning Champion Irina Krush was the clear favourite when her perennial rival, Anna Zatonskih, declined her invitation. The event featured veterans like Tatev Abrahamyan and Sabina Foisor, as well as yours truly. Joining the ranks were newcomers Nazí Paikidze, Anna Sharevich, and young stars Annie Wang (12) and Jennifer Yu (13).

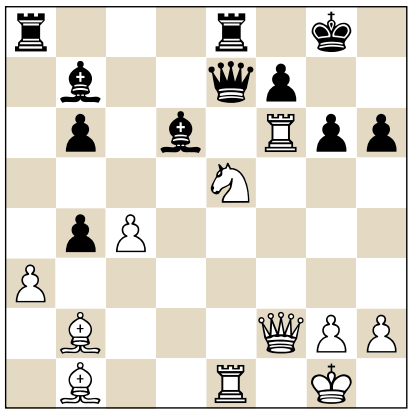
Both events featured an interesting power dynamic: a clear contingent of favourites along with talented youths hungry to shine. Looking at the final standings, one would think that the favourites and simply cruised through the field, but far from it. Almost no one seemed to be immune to caving in under the pressure.

> 'It was not unusual for the games to swing from one end of the evaluation spectrum to the other within a few moves.'

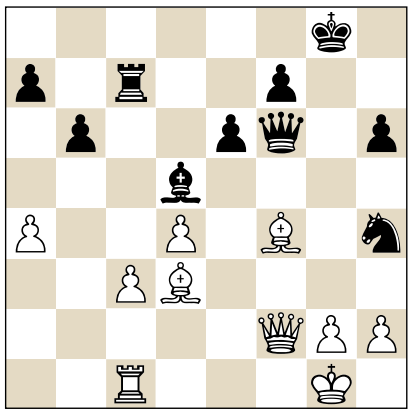
Blunders occurred when you would least expect them; it was not unusual for the games to swing from one end of the evaluation spectrum to the other within a few moves. The surprises on the board were coupled with surprises in the tournament itself. The arbiter's ruling forfeiting Wesley So in Round 9 for note-taking shocked the chess world and beyond.

Before we go into further detail, I would like the reader to warm up with a few exercise positions taken from the Championships. Your goal is to find the winning move after the blunder. For bonus points, identify the player making the error. The answers are at the end.

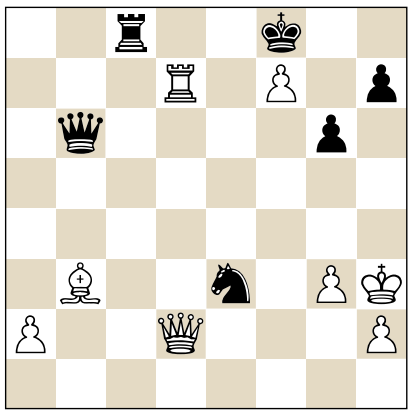
Blunder Gallery



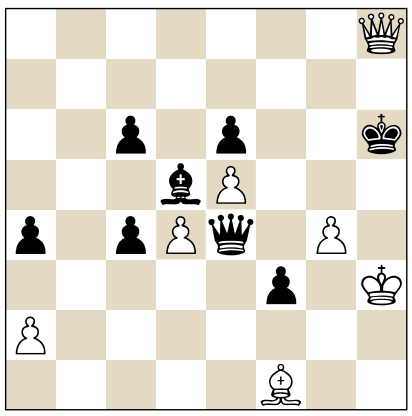
1. Black to play
White just played 25.♖f4xf6



2. Black to play
White just played 31.♗d2xf4



3. Black to play
White just moved the king out of check from g2-h3



4. Black to play
White just played 57.♕g8-h8+

CONTINUED ON PAGE 42

Wesley So forfeiture controversy

The surprises didn't stop at the board. In a stunning turn of events, Wesley So was forfeited in Round 9 after six moves against Varuzhan Akobian, who complained to Chief Arbiter Tony Rich that So was writing down notes during the game. So had already been told twice to stop taking notes earlier in the tournament. In Round 1, So reminded himself to use his time, and in Round 2 to 'Sit down for the entire game. Never get up'.

So explained that his performance was affected by personal issues stemming from his departure from Webster University to become a professional player. He had recorded notes during the games in the past, but said that no one ever complained. He was surprised with the forfeiture decision, but says that he has now learned his lesson.

Rather than writing on the score-sheet as he was told not to do in earlier rounds, in Round 9 So wrote his notes on a separate score-sheet placed underneath the actual score-sheet. Rich commented that So may have thought that it was acceptable to write notes on a separate sheet, which So called 'scrap paper'.

In this round's notes, So reminded himself to 'double check and triple check' and again to 'use your time'. Although So was trying to break the habit, he said that he needed the notes to remind himself to focus at difficult times when his mind was filled with 'angry distractions. It's not like I don't know to double and triple check and use my time wisely. It was just a comfort thing.'

The relevant FIDE Laws of Chess include:

8.1b – limiting the use of the score-sheet to recording only moves, draw offers, and time

11.3 – forbidding players from using any notes or sources beyond the chess board

11.7 – Imposing a loss as the penalty for refusing to comply with the FIDE Laws of Chess.

So calmly accepted the ruling. He agreed with the decision to record the game as a loss, but appealed the loss of his FIDE rating points. Unfortunately, his appeal was based on the mistaken assumption that players do not lose FIDE rating points for a cell phone penalty. The Appeals Committee consisted of Rusa Goletiani, who was playing in the Women's Championship, on-site commentator Ben Finegold, and arbiter Chris Bird, who joined the meeting by phone. They dismissed So's appeal and upheld the original decision.

The ruling caused a stir in the chess community, with various players weighing in with their thoughts. Local media picked up the story and interviewed So's adoptive and biological families for the background story. In the live broadcast the next morning, when asked what he thought of Akobian's actions, So remarked, 'He obviously wanted a free point.' Nakamura tweeted that So's comment was 'Very shameful and disrespectful' and that he blamed 'everyone except yourself for breaking the rules.'

So says that he doesn't mind everyone being aware of the forfeit, but he is 'only slightly bothered by the way everyone feels they know 'me'.' (For more about the background of Wesley So's notes to himself and the stress he was under in St. Louis, read his interview in this issue – ed.)

Despite the controversy, So showed tremendous composure by beautifully overpowering Kamsky in Round 10 with Black. Although the tournament as a whole was not the finish So had hoped for (he finished third, one and a half points behind Nakamura), he displayed great sportsmanship and was in good spirits during the closing ceremony.

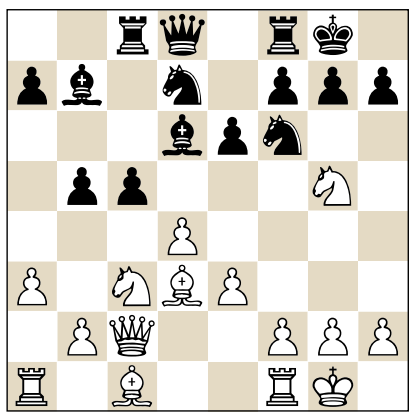
By Round 9, So was having a relatively difficult tournament, including a Round 3 loss to rising star Sam Sevian. Before the tournament, Sevian's goal was to finish with a plus-one score, but he says his 50 per cent score against a field with a FIDE average of 2652 was 'not bad either'.

NOTES BY
Sam Sevian

SL 8.4 – D46
Wesley So
Samuel Sevian
St. Louis 2015 (3)

I obviously was a little jittery before the game. I've watched Wesley's games a lot and have an enormous respect for his creativity and class. And there it was; he surprised me very early in the game with this ultra-modern line in the Anti-Meran. Frankly, the position after 14.f4 was all new to me.

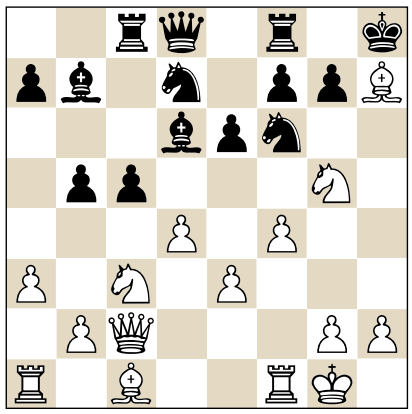
1.♘f3 d5 2.d4 ♘f6 3.c4 e6 4.♘c3 c6 5.e3 ♘bd7 6.♕c2 ♗d6 7.♗d3 0-0 8.0-0 dxc4 9.♗xc4 b5 10.♗d3 ♗b7 11.a3 ♖c8 12.♘g5 c5



13.♗xh7+ This was a surprise to me. From this point on I had to start thinking all by myself.

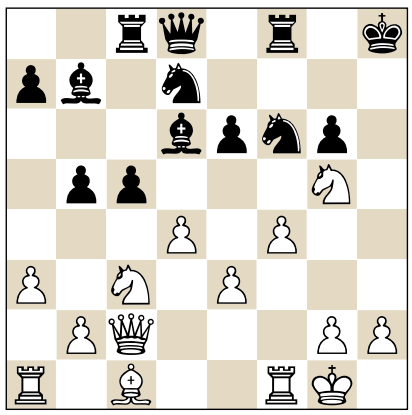
13.♘xh7 had been played. During the game I recalled that this wasn't a good choice for Aronian in his game against Anand in Wijk aan Zee in 2013, which saw 13...♘g4 14.f4 cxd4 15.exd4 ♗c5 16.♗e2 ♘de5 17.♗xg4 ♗xd4+ 18.♔h1 ♘xg4 19.♘xf8 f5 20.♘g6 ♕f6 21.h3 ♕xg6 22.♕e2 ♕h5 23.♕d3 ♗e3 0-1.

13...♔h8 14.f4

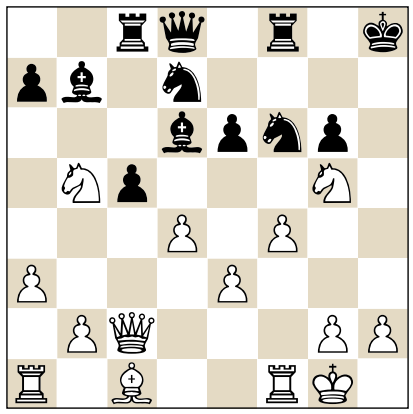


14...g6! I think that this is not only the best move, but also the best practical decision. If I had played something else, for example 14...♕b6, or 14...cxd4 and then ...♕b6, I would have had a huge problem with ♕d3-h3 ideas. With 14...g6, I avoid this.

15.♗xg6 fxg6

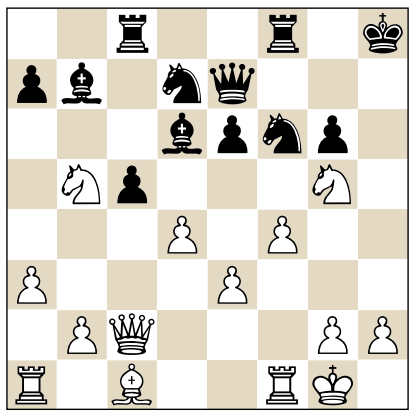


16.♘xb5! I had missed this move. I thought he would play 16.♘xe6 ♕e8 17.♘xf8 ♘xf8, with double-edged play. I have two minor pieces for a rook and three pawns, but I also control the light squares, which I think compensates for the material deficit.



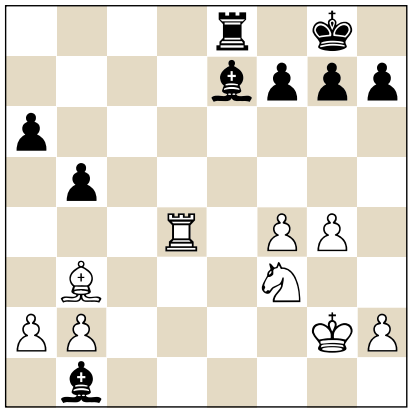
16...♕e7?! This move could be criticized for allowing ♘xd6. But the character of the position is so unbalanced that such positional considerations hardly apply here.

After 16...♗b8 17.♘xe6 (17.♕xg6 ♕e7 would transpose to the game) 17...♕b6 18.♘xf8 ♘xf8 19.♕e2 ♔g7, although White is up four(!) pawns, Black's activity fully compensates.

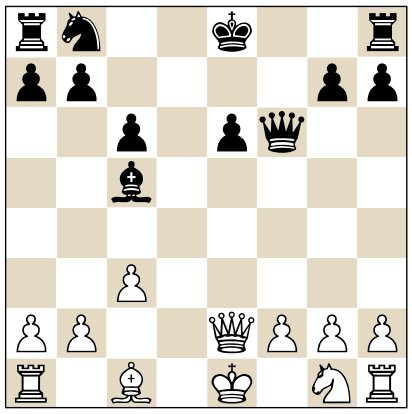


17.♕xg6?!

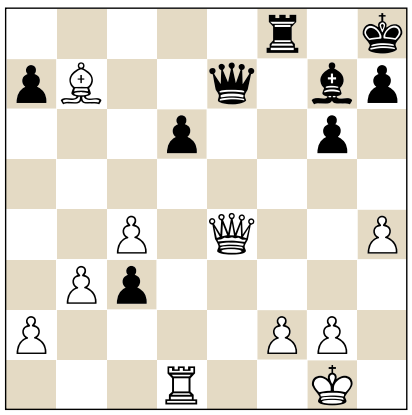
This natural and threatening move allows Black to consolidate his defence. I felt somewhat relieved



5. White to play
Black attempted to escape from getting his bishop trapped by playing 30...♗g6-b1



6. White to play
The players exchanged bishops on e6 and Black recaptured with the pawn, 11...fxe6



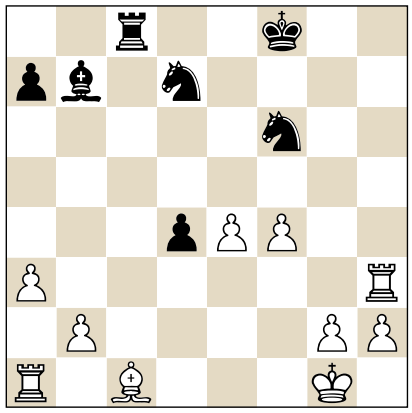
7. Black to play
White played 27.♕c2-e4, defending the bishop and the h4-pawn

SOLUTIONS ON PAGE 48

Blunder Gallery

here – if you can actually ever feel relief in this kind of game.

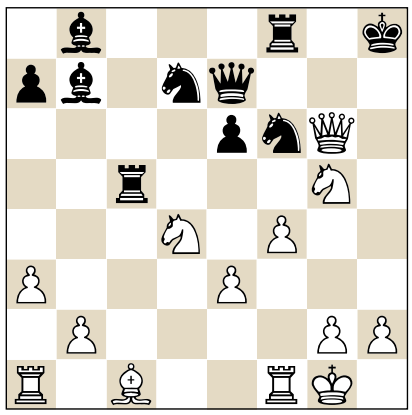
The critical position arises after 17.♘xd6 ♕xd6 18.♕xg6 cxd4 (after 18...♕e7 19.♗d2 White has a winning attack – the plan is to play dxc5, followed by ♗c3: 19...♖c6 – 19...cxd4? 20.♗b4, and wins – 20.dxc5, winning). Wesley was probably unable to find anything here. If White does not act fast, he may be forced to go for perpetual check; otherwise Black can play ...♕e7, followed by ...♘h7: 19.e4! (White not only wants to play ♖f3-h3 but also e4-e5 to deflect the black knight from f6. Bad is 19.♘f7+? ♖xf7 20.♕xf7 ♖g8 21.g3 ♕c6, and it's game over) 19...♕e7 (after 19...♗xe4 20.♘xe4 ♕d5 21.♘g5 ♕f5 22.♕xf5 exf5 23.♘e6 White will pick up a third pawn and will be completely winning) 20.♖f3 ♕g7 21.♖h3+ ♔g8 22.♕xg7+ ♔xg7 23.♘xe6+ ♔f7 24.♘xf8 ♔xf8



ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

Yes, White is up material, but with a strong passed black d-pawn, the open c-file and activity the game is far from decided.

17...♗b8 18.dxc5 ♖xc5 19.♘d4



19...♖g8

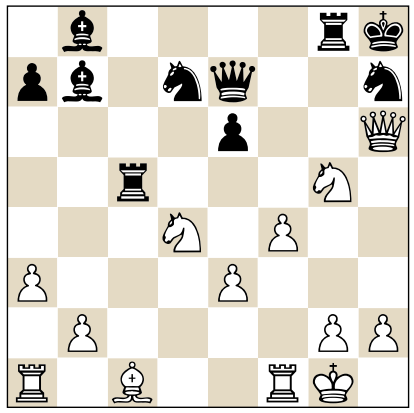
Interesting was 19...♘h7!?, e.g. 20.h4 ♘xg5 21.hxg5 ♖g8 22.♕xe6 ♕xe6 23.♘xe6 ♖c2 24.♖f2 ♖xf2 25.♔xf2 ♖e8 26.♘d4 ♘c5, with a white edge.

20.♕h6+

Bad is 20.♘f7+?? ♕xf7 21.♕xf7 ♖xg2+ 22.♔h1 ♖g7+, and Black is completely winning.

20...♘h7

After 20...♕h7?? 21.♘f7 is mate.



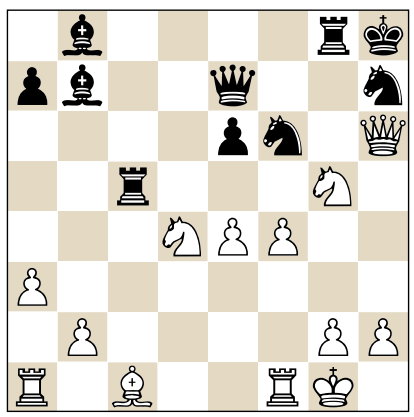
21.e4

Many commentators, equipped with their engines, were screaming h4, I was told later. But the point of h4 is to be able to capture on g5 with the pawn, and as a matter of fact, e4 is based on a similar idea: the ability to control g5 with the bishop.

After 21.h4, Black plays 21...♘f8!, for example 22.b4 ♖g6 23.♕h5 ♖c8 24.♗b2 ♔g8. This is the point of playing ...♘f8, followed by ...♖g6, Black's king gets out of the discovery.

After 21.♘dxe6 I saw a nice little geometrical trick, which Wesley obviously had seen as well: 21...♖c6! 22.e4 ♖xg5 23.fxg5 ♕xe6.

21...♘f6!?



This is the position I was going for when I took on c5 with the rook.

LENNART OOTES

America's youngest grandmaster ever, Sam Sevian (14), aims to play chess professionally as 'all other interests pale in comparison to chess'.

White has four pawns for the piece, but I felt that the activity of my pieces compensated for this pawn mass.

22.b4

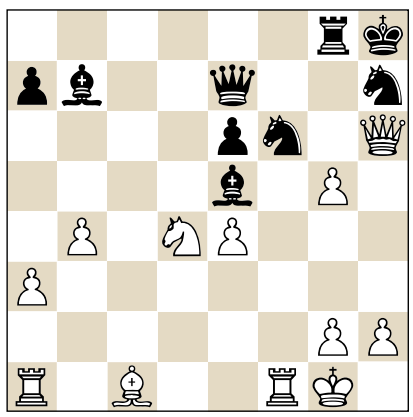
After a very long think (about 40 minutes) he chooses to play the most natural move, but I had something prepared for this.

22...♖cxg5

22...♖c4 23.♗b2 e5 24.♘df3 cannot be allowed.

23.fxg5 ♗e5?!

This is the move I had planned. However, the accurate move order is ...♘g4 first and only then ...♗e5, because the computer finds this incredible idea for White with ♘b3.



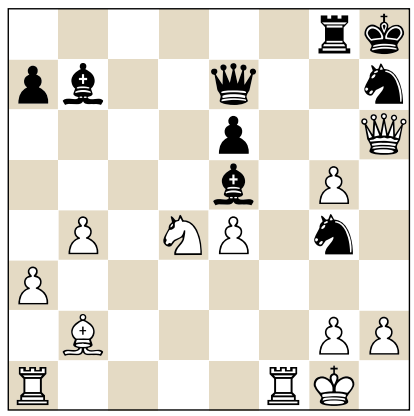
24.♗b2

As said, the computer suggests 24.♘b3! ♘g4 (24...♗xa1? loses to 25.♘xa1 ♘g4 26.♕h5 ♘e5 27.♗b2 ♖xg5 28.♖f7!) 25.♕h5 ♗a6 26.♗d2 ♗e2 27.♖f7 ♕xf7 28.♕xf7 ♖f8 29.♕xa7 ♗xa1 30.g3 ♗g7 31.h3 ♖f3! (31...♘e5 fails to 32.♘d4 ♘f3+ 33.♘xf3 ♗xf3 34.♕e3, winning) 32.hxg4 ♖xb3. Again the position remains highly unbalanced and I don't think any player in the world with 15 minutes on the clock would dare to play such lines on either side. It took several hours of over-the-board analysis to arrive at these lines.

24...♘g4

Here Wesley was facing a tough choice: 25.♕h5 or 25.♕h3.

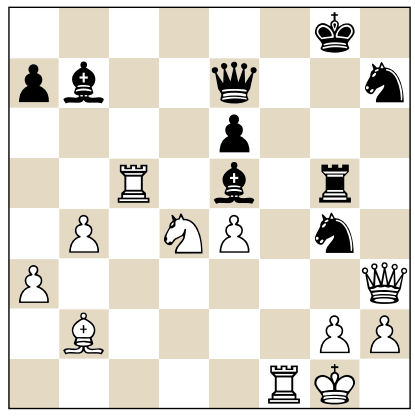
25.♕h3 is really a hard to find move, because if you don't find some fantastic defence in the lines to follow, you will lose on the spot, and this is what I felt.



25.♕h5?

This is obviously a blunder, and the reason might be over-estimating the move ...♖xg5, which showed up in other critical variations.

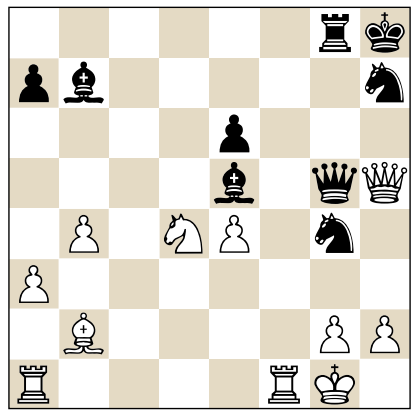
So White's best bet was 25.♕h3 ♖xg5 26.♖ac1 (26.♖ae1 ♔g8, with a powerful attack for Black) 26...♔g8 (after 26...♗xe4 a fantastic fork saves the day: 27.♖f4!!. Surely, with so little time this is almost impossible to see) 27.♖c5!. Another amazing computer creation.



ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

27...♖g6 28.♘c6! ♗xc6 29.♗xe5 ♘xe5 30.♖xe5 ♕d6 31.♕c3 ♘g5 and even after a sequence of only moves for White, Black keeps a very strong attack.

25...♕xg5! After 25...♖xg5, 26.♖f7! suddenly turns the tables.



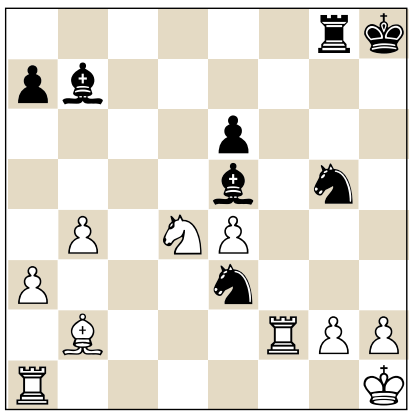
26.♕h3?!

Not the best defence. After 26.♕xg5 ♘xg5 27.♖ae1 ♗xh2+ 28.♔h1 ♗e5, Black is winning, but he will have to work a little harder now.

26...♕e3+

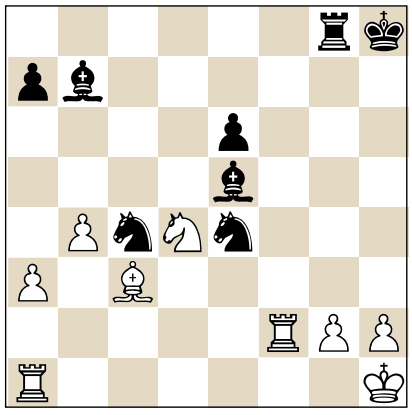
Here 26...♕d2! 27.♕c3 ♕h6! 28.♕h3 ♕xh3 29.gxh3 ♘xh2+ 30.♔f2 ♘xf1 31.♖xf1 ♗xe4 was probably the best way to win.

27.♕xe3 ♘xe3 28.♖f2 ♘g5 29.♔h1



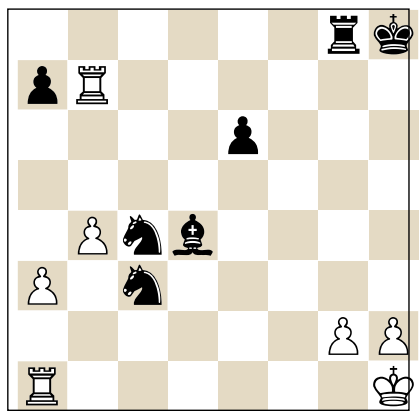
29...♘c4? Not quite allowing the win to slip away, but certainly not the best move. Instead, 29...♘xe4 30.♖e2 (I was concerned about 30.♖f7, completely missing 30...♖xg2 31.♖xb7 ♘f2 mate) 30...♖xg2! ends the game immediately: 31.♖xg2 ♘f2+ 32.♔g1 ♘h3+ 33.♔h1 ♗xg2 mate.

30.♗c3 ♘xe4



31.♖f7?! His last chance was 31.♖f3!, but I had seen what to do here: 31...♘xc3 32.♖h3+! ♔g7 33.♖xc3 ♔f6! (33...♗xd4 34.♖g3+ is a draw, because if I ever put my king on the f-file he has ♖f1+) 34.♖a2 ♗xd4 35.♖xc4 ♗d5 36.♖xd4 ♗xa2, winning.

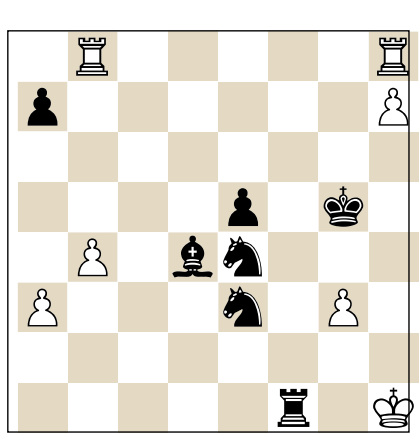
31...♘xc3 32.♖xb7 ♗xd4



Now Black is winning. White has some rook moves but nothing real.

33.♖f1 ♖g7 34.♖b8+ ♔h7 35.g3 e5 36.♖ff8 ♘e3 Setting up a mating net. **37.h4 ♘e4 38.♖h8+ ♔g6 39.h5+ ♔g5 40.h6 ♖f7** White is mated.

41.h7 ♖f1+



Here White resigned in view of 42.♔h2 ♘g4+ 43.♔h3 (43.♔g2 is mate after 43...♖f2+ 44.♔g1 ♖e2+ 45.♔f1 ♘xg3) 43...♖h1+ (or 43...♘ef2+ 44.♔g2 ♘e3+ 45.♔f3 ♘h1+ 46.♔e2 ♘xg3+ 47.♔d3 ♖d1 mate) 44.♔g2 ♖h2+ 45.♔f3 (or 45.♔f1 ♘e3+ 46.♔g1 ♖g2+ 47.♔h1 ♘xg3 mate) 45...♘d2 mate.

St. Louis 2015 — **cat. XVI**

					1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12		TPR
1	Hikaru Nakamura	IGM	USA	2798	*	½	½	1	½	½	1	½	1	1	½	1	8	2802
2	Ray Robson	IGM	USA	2656	½	*	1	½	½	0	½	½	1	1	1	1	7½	2773
3	Wesley So	IGM	USA	2788	½	0	*	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	6½	2693
4	Alexander Onischuk	IGM	USA	2665	0	½	0	*	1	1	½	½	½	½	½	1	6	2675
5	Samuel Sevian	IGM	USA	2531	½	½	1	0	*	½	0	½	1	1	0	½	5½	2652
6	Gata Kamsky	IGM	USA	2683	½	1	0	0	½	*	½	½	½	1	½	½	5½	2638
7	Varuzhan Akobian	IGM	USA	2622	0	½	1	½	1	½	*	½	0	0	½	1	5½	2643
8	Samuel Shankland	IGM	USA	2661	½	½	0	½	½	½	½	*	½	0	1	½	5	2604
9	Kayden Troff	IGM	USA	2532	0	0	0	½	0	½	1	½	*	1	½	1	5	2615
10	Conrad Holt	IGM	USA	2530	0	0	1	½	0	0	1	1	0	*	1	0	4½	2587
11	Timur Gareev	IGM	USA	2604	½	0	0	½	1	½	½	0	½	0	*	½	4	2543
12	Daniel Naroditsky	IGM	USA	2633	0	0	0	0	½	½	0	½	0	1	½	*	3	2467

Nakamura continues winning streak

Nakamura rebounded from his last-place finish at the 2014 Sinquefield Cup to approach the coveted 2800 threshold with a series of good tournaments, including a win in Gibraltar this year. His winning streak continued with his fourth U.S. Championship title following wins in 2005, 2009 and 2012. Having skipped the previous two editions, he decided to play again in 2015 because 'the rise of the junior players – Robson, Shankland and Naroditsky in particular – as well as Wesley So's federation change, resulted in a record average rating, with no other major events going on at the same time.'

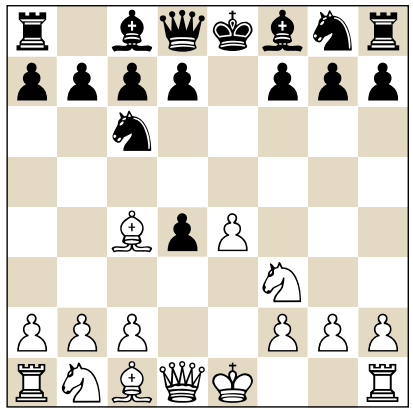
Before the tournament everyone, including Nakamura, was betting that he and So would be the top two contenders. But So's slip-up paved the way for a new rival in the form of Ray Robson, who seemed to have done something about his notorious frantic time-trouble scrambles. Robson is one of the few players to have competed in every U.S. Championship since its move to St. Louis in 2009. 'Rayski' was tied for the lead after Round 7 with five points. Later he was trailing Nakamura by a mere half point. If Robson won his last round, which he did against the unpredictable Timur Gareev, and Nakamura drew, there could have been a play-off for first. (Gareev certainly gets the prize for gutsiest player. He played Owen's Defence against Nakamura – and drew – and 1.d4 d6 2.♘f3 h6 3.e4 g5?! against Akobian – another draw.)

It looked like all signs were pointing in the direction of a play-off, until Onischuk gifted Nakamura a rook in the last round.

NOTES BY
Ben Finegold

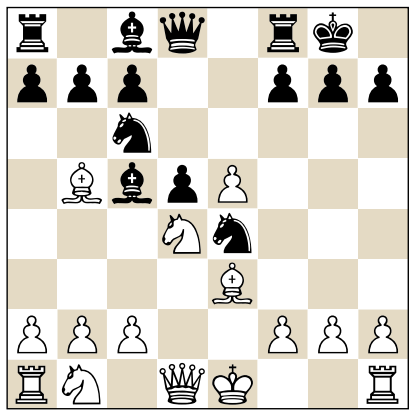
KP 13.8 – C56
Hikaru Nakamura
Alexander Onischuk
St. Louis 2015 (11)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 exd4 4.♗c4



I jokingly asked Onischuk if he expected this line from Nakamura. Alex told me that Hikaru had played this against him a few years back!

4...♘f6 5.e5 d5 6.♗b5 ♘e4 7.♘xd4 ♗c5 8.♗e3 0-0



GM Josh Friedel, who was visiting the tournament, thought this line was bad for Black, but Onischuk insisted that Black equalizes.

8...♗d7 is more common.

9.♘xc6 bxc6 10.♗xc5 ♘xc5 11.♗xc6 ♖b8

11...♗a6 is more common and scores better! Having said that, 11...♖b8 is safe and equalizes, and is also the preferred engine move.

12.0-0

Played after a long think. White decides to make his king safe before it's too late.

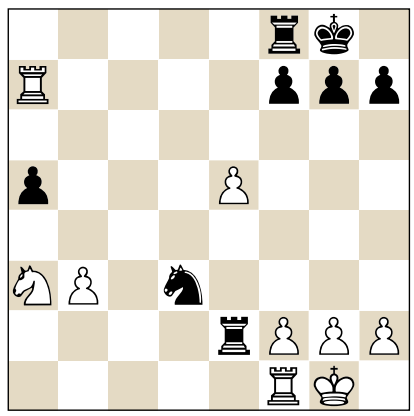
12...♖xb2 13.♕xd5 ♕xd5 14.♗xd5 ♖xc2 15.♘a3 ♖e2 16.♖ac1 ♘d3

The position is equal after 16...♘e6.

17.♖xc7 ♗e6! 18.♗b3

18.♗xe6 fxe6 yields White nothing.

18...a5 19.♖a7 ♗xb3 20.axb3

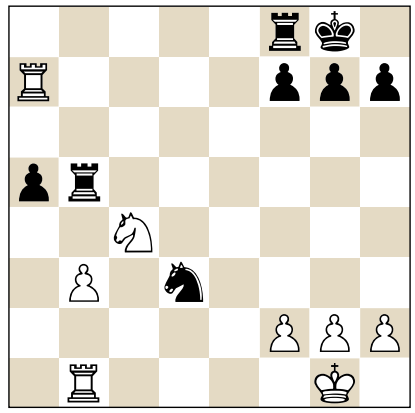


We all thought this would be a 30-move draw, but Black still needs to be a little careful.

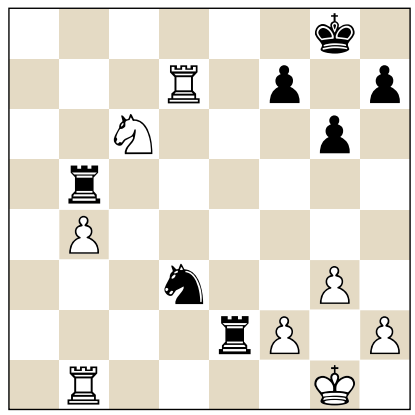
20...♖xe5 21.♘c4 ♖b5 22.♖b1

LENNART OOTES

The rise of the junior players – Robson, Shankland and Naroditsky in particular – as well as Wesley So's federation change, lured Hikaru Nakamura back to the U.S. Championship.



22...♘c5?! 22...a4 23.♖xa4 ♘c5 24.♖a3 ♖fb8 should draw. **23.♘xa5 ♖e8 24.g3 g6 25.b4 ♘d3 26.♘c6 ♖e2 27.♖d7**



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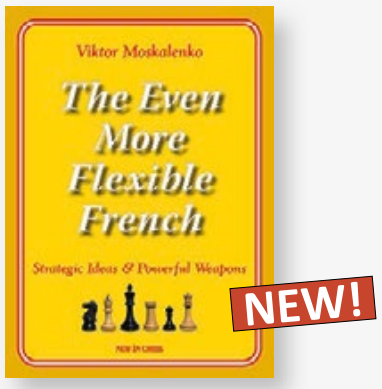

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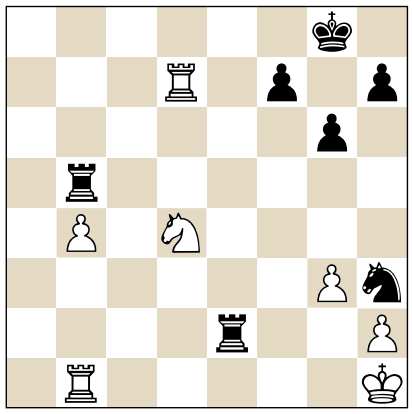
27...♘xf2? This just loses. 27...♖b6 28.♖xd3 ♖xc6 29.b5 ♖b6 will probably be a draw.
28.♘d4 ♘h3+ 29.♔h1



29...♘f2+ Alex had overlooked that after 29...♖d2 30.♖d8+! ♔g7 31.♘e6+ fxe6 32.♖xd2 wins.
30.♔g2 ♘d1+
Alex had missed that his rook was hanging after this discovered check. Luckily it doesn't matter.
31.♘xe2 Black resigned.

■ ■ ■

Although Nakamura finished first, he was more concerned about the nature of his play throughout the tournament than the standings. In the post-mortem commentary after his Round-8 win over Kayden Troff, Nakamura called his own play 'moronic' and said that he was making 'Mickey Mouse' moves.

Nakamura later explained that the 'Mickey Mouse' comment was misconstrued and was in fact a reference to a comment by Magnus Carlsen. (When asked by the Norwegian newspaper VG what he thought about Nakamura's rise to the top 3, Carlsen had quipped: 'He has won some Mickey Mouse tournaments recently, now he gets to face the big guys. Fun!' – ed.) Said Nakamura: 'In general, the extra pressure of having to win every game, as opposed to letting the game flow naturally, meant that I seemed to be over-pressing and making uncharacteristic errors in many games.' Even so, with this reflective attitude we can be sure to see Nakamura keep up his upward trend.

Seventh title for Irina Krush

The U.S. Women's Championship is played alongside the main event. This year, it also featured a round-robin of 12 of the top female players in the country vying for a total $75,000 prize-fund (the prize-fund in the 'open' championship is $175,000). New this time was the $64,000 Fischer prize offered in the women's section to any player finishing with a perfect score.

For the past few years, the main rivals were Irina Krush and Anna Zatonskih. However, Zatonskih declined her spot, leaving the door wide open for a new contender. Krush participated in the Women's World Championships in Sochi, Russia, a week before the U.S. Championships. Although playing in two demanding consecutive events could have led to a burn-out, Krush said that it consolidated the preparation she needed to do.

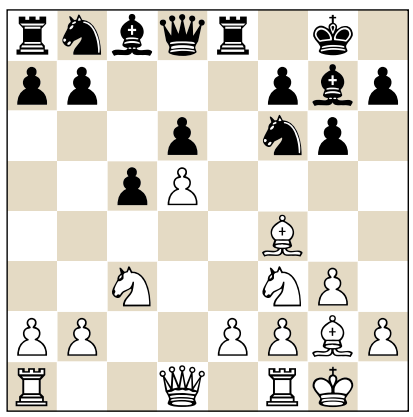
Tatev Abrahamyan had previously challenged Krush in play-off matches. After a tough start for Abrahamyan, a clear leader emerged in the form of Katerina Nemcova. She was even leading the tournament by a full point after Round 7, as Krush had suffered an early Round-3 defeat against newcomer Nazí Paikidze, who recently switched federations from her native Georgia. Paikidze ended up undefeated in the event. She beat Nemcova in the decisive 10th round to create a two-way tie for second with 7/10, while Krush went into the last round with 8/10. Krush made an easy draw against Nemcova in the last round, avoiding a play-off and cruising to her seventh title. Paikidze finished second on tiebreaks in her debut event, with Nemcova making a statement by finishing third.

In fact, it wasn't her early loss that affected Krush's self-confidence. 'When I lost to Nazí, I had 1½/3, hardly a convincing score. But I didn't take that loss too badly, because after all, you sometimes lose when your opponent just plays a better game than you. The draw against Anna Sharevich in Round 6 was a huge blow due to the nature of the game, the extent to which I had a winning position and the way I blew it.

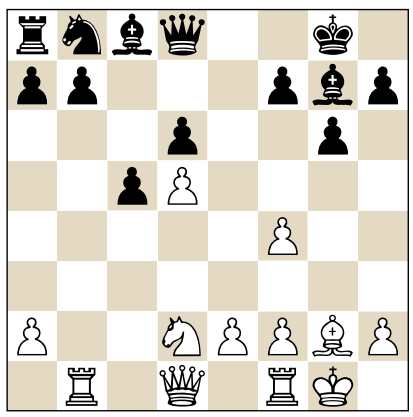
NOTES BY
Irina Krush

BI 9.15 – A62
Anna Sharevich
Irina Krush
St. Louis 2015 (6)

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.g3 c5
I was half a point behind Katerina Nemcova at this point, so the Benoni seemed like an appropriate choice. The opening stage of the game indeed worked out perfectly.
4.d5 exd5 5.cxd5 d6 6.♘c3 g6 7.♘f3 ♗g7 8.♗g2 0-0 9.0-0 ♖e8 10.♗f4

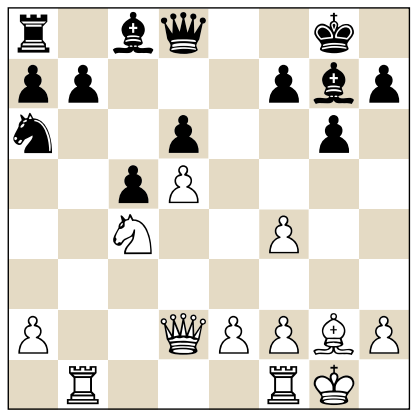


Anna is faithful to her favourite move.
10...♘e4 11.♘xe4 ♖xe4 12.♘d2 ♖xf4!? 13.gxf4 ♗xb2 14.♖b1 ♗g7

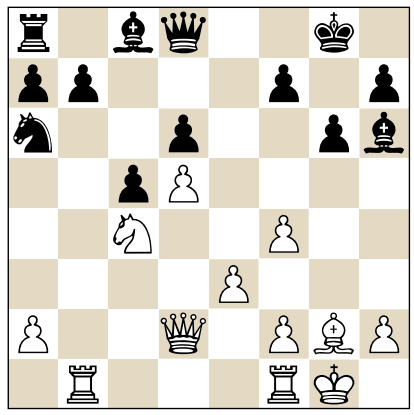


A complicated position that is entirely within the theory has arisen from the opening. Black sacrifices an exchange for a pawn, hoping to prove that White's centre will either be inflexible, limiting her chances of active play, or, if White advances the pawn to e4, just weak.

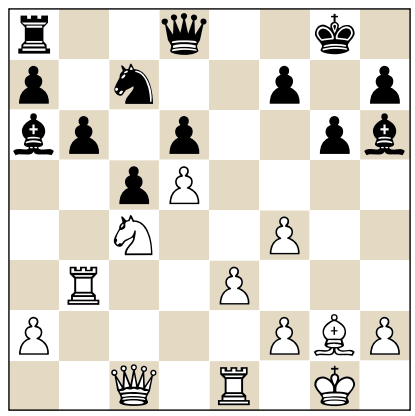
15.♘c4
It was not surprising that White placed her knight on this most natural square, although there are subtler alternatives.
15...♘a6 16.♕d2
16.e4 is a principled option for White, trying to get in e5. However, after 16...♖b8! 17.e5 dxe5 18.♘xe5 (18.fxe5 b5 and the key is that the ♘a6 is protecting the ♖b8, so White cannot hold her centre) 18...♗f5 would lead to an unclear position.



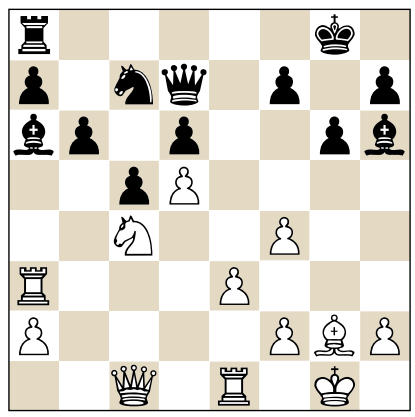
16...♗h6
An important move, stopping any active white ideas with e4, as e4 would now be met by ...♕h4, and the f4-pawn would be indefensible.
17.e3



This looks like an extremely solid and logical pawn set-up for White, and it's true that it stops Black from playing on the dark squares and getting to White's king. On the other hand, if White doesn't use her extra pawn in the centre, Black is free to use her 3-1 majority on the queenside, and that will be White's problem – a 'solid' position with no clear plan whatsoever.
17...b6
Another typical move for this position, stopping ♘a5 ideas.
17...♘c7 immediately allows 18.♘a5.
18.♖b3 ♘c7 19.♖e1 ♗a6 20.♕c1



20...♕d7
During the game I was happy with this move, because after the immediate 20...♗xc4 21.♕xc4 b5 I was afraid of the exchange sac 22.♖xb5 ♘xb5 23.♕xb5 ♖b8 24.♕a6, and while Black is obviously doing well, I wasn't sure I could win this simplified position.
20...♕d7 not only controls b5, but also prevents a4.
21.♖a3



This was an important moment, because 21...b5 was very tempting as well. I decided to keep it simple, removing the knight and just advancing my queenside pawn majority.
21...♗xc4 22.♕xc4 b5 23.♕e2 a5 24.♖c3 a4 25.♕f3
Trying to play e4? It is too late for that, though.
25...b4 26.♖cc1 ♘b5

Blunder Gallery SOLUTIONS

1. Abrahamyan- Wang (Round 1)
This allowed Black to unleash a furious pin with 25...♗c5.

2. Nakamura-So (4)
White should have instead played 31.♕xf4, with an advantage. So found the tactical shot 31...♘f3+!, converting into an ending up a pawn. However, Nakamura still managed to escape with half a point.

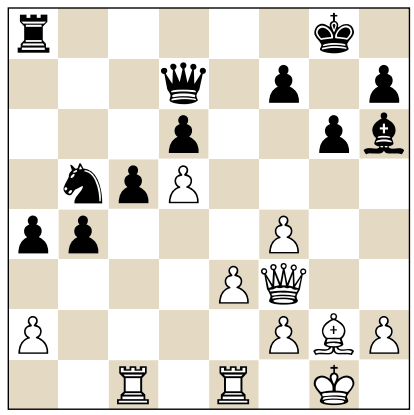
3. Holt-Troff (5)
The players just reached the time-control and White has multiple ways to win. However, he played one of the few moves that walks into a devastating mating net after 43...g5! Holt was so upset that he bolted away from the board after the game without signing the scoresheets.

4. Naroditsky-Robson (7)
White missed a forced perpetual after 57.♕f8+. The move played in the game allows Black to interpose the checks and escape with 57…♕h7.

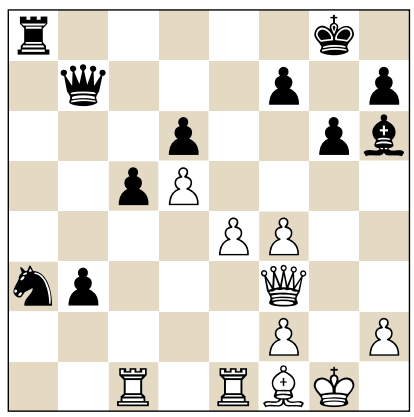
5. So-Onischuk (7)
The attempt was unsuccessful, as the bishop nevertheless gets trapped by 31.♘d2, allowing So to cash in easily.

6. Krush-Wang (7)
Amazingly, both players missed that White can win the bishop with the rudimentary 12.♕h5+. Fortunately for Krush, she proceeded to win the game, and the tournament.

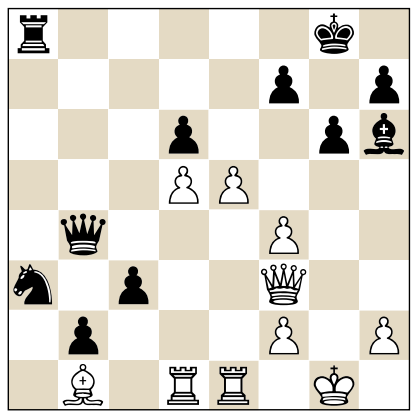
7. Goletiani-Melekhina (9)
The counter-intuitive 27...♖e8! takes advantage of the passed c3-pawn, forcing an unfavourable queen trade, when Black either queens or wins a piece by force. Instead, both players missed the reply and repeated moves for a draw. At this point, I was already having a tough tournament and was psychologically unprepared for finding a forced, winning sequence.



27.♗h3
This helps the queen get to a better square. From b7 it supports the advance of the pawns. White should have played 27.♗f1 straightaway.
27...♕b7 28.♗f1 ♘a3 29.e4 b3 30.axb3 axb3

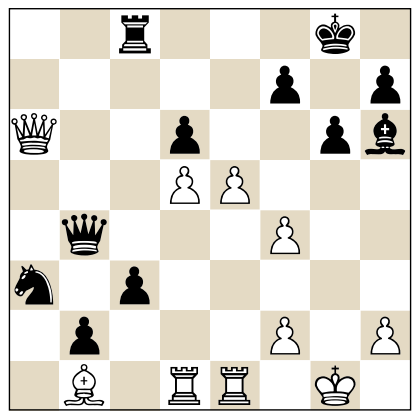


31.♗d3 This move doesn't stop the advance of the pawns, so Black should be easily winning now. 31.♖c3 was the move I was expecting and it looked like the only one. Then Black had a number of candidate moves to consider, like 31...♕b4, 31...♘c2 and 31...c4.
31...b2 32.♖cd1 c4 33.♗b1 ♕b4 34.e5 c3

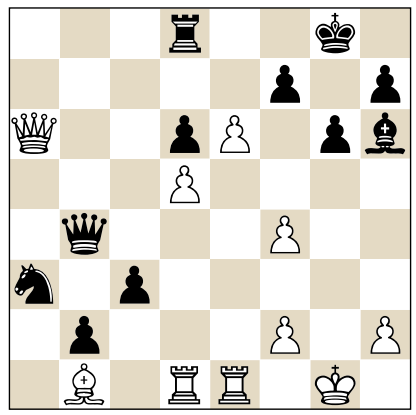


35.♕d3 This queen move took me by surprise, and now I started doing everything wrong.

35.exd6 ♘xb1 36.d7 ♘d2 37.♖e8+ ♗f8 is the kind of stuff that needed to be calculated. It's just a bit messy but definitely not adequate for White.
35...♖c8
35...♗xf4 would be a lovely move to play, but I thought that it wasn't possible because of 36.♖e4. However, it shouldn't be that hard to calculate 36...♕b3 37.♖xf4 ♘xb1 38.♖xb1 ♖a1, and the pawns decide the day. Just for perspective, my move 35...♖c8 is about the computer's seventh choice. Still more than a -3 advantage, but a lot less than it could have been.
36.♕a6

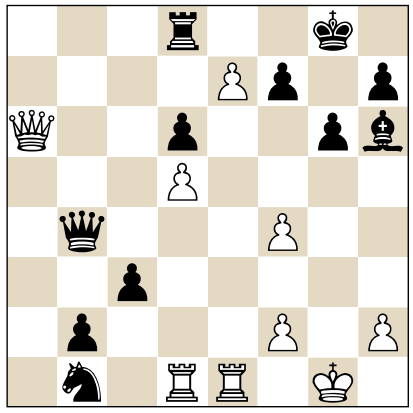


36...♖d8
This is certainly another poor decision, because the rook is vulnerable on that square compared to f8 or b8. It holds up objectively, but only because of a line that I had very little chance of finding, especially with the time dwindling down.
37.e6



37...fxe6?? A terrible decision, opening the d-file for the rook. This will really cost Black.
I was worried about 37...♘xb1 in view

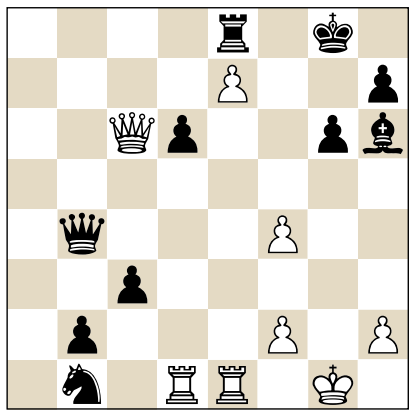
of 38.e7 ♖e8 (I can't blame myself too much, since it's not obvious at all, but I had missed that I could actually have allowed the e-pawn to queen:



ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

38...♖b8!! 39.e8♕+ ♖xe8 40.♖xe8+ ♔g7 41.♕c8 ♘d2 42.♕d8 (42.♖g8+ ♔f6 43.♕d8+ ♔f5, and the king walks up the board and escapes the checks) 42...♘f3+ (covering h4) 43.♔g2 ♗xf4 44.♖g8+ ♔h6) 39.♕c6 ♕b8 40.♖xb1 ♗g7 41.♖e3, and I thought White could sacrifice the exchange on c3 and win the b2-pawn. Obviously, that would still leave White with problems because her king is exposed in the ♕+♖ endgame, but I wanted more.

38.dxe6 ♘xb1 39.e7 ♖e8 40.♕c6



My intention had been to use the f7-square for my king (this is what was behind my capture on e6), but now I saw that after 40...♔f7 41.♖xd6 the threat is just ♕xe8+ and ♖d8+. So my queen had to retreat to b8 anyway, and I had simply given White the very powerful ♖xd6.

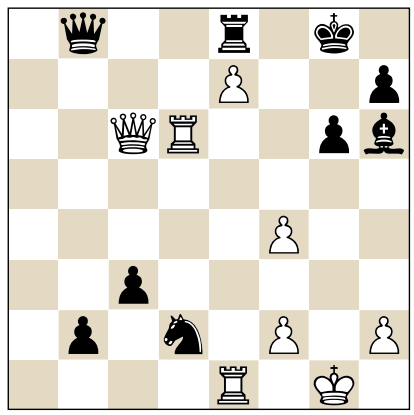
40...♕b8

White thought for a while here, and I had time to assess that this position should be a draw. I was even lucky not to be losing after such terrible play.

41.♖xd6 ♘d2

While there are other options like 41...c2, I had calculated this move in her time and decided it was the safest way to a draw.

Now White has two obvious moves: 42.♖xg6+ and 42.♖d8, which looks more dangerous. I saw that after 42.♖d8 Black would make a draw.

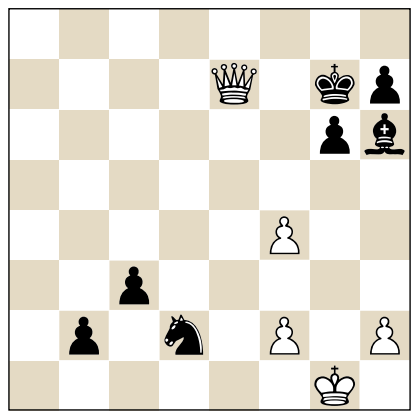


42.♖xg6+??

42.♖d8 ♖xd8 43.e8♕+ (43.exd8♕+ seems similar but actually loses to 43...♕xd8 44.♖e8+ ♗f8! 45.♕e6+ ♔g7 46.♕e5+ ♔h6, and there are no more checks) 43...♖xe8 44.♖xe8+ ♕xe8 45.♕xe8+ ♔g7 46.♕e7+

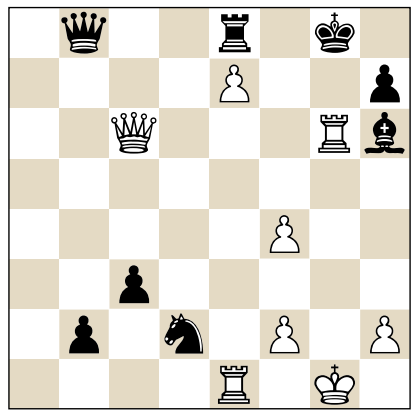
LENNART OOTES

Irina Krush: 'The confidence that people had in me was a big help in getting past the trauma of this game.'



ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

White is up a queen for two pieces, but can only play for a perpetual, since Black's passed pawns are too strong.



42...hxg6?? I played this very fast, since it had featured in my calculations while she was thinking. It was

LENNART OOTES

A corporate lawyer practicing in New York, our reporter Alisa Melekhina has less time to play, but she remains passionate about chess.

not that I hadn't taken time to think; I just didn't see the possibility of the bishop moving backwards to block the check. After that White would have had to resign, since the rook is hanging and there is no perpetual.

One of the lessons to draw from this is never to make fast moves. It is one thing to see something in your calculations, but quite another thing to see it on the board.

Another factor is that psychologically, having seen a draw for White after 42.♖d8, I already believed it was the logical outcome of the game. I had lost all hope of winning the game, so it looked as if all White's moves would lead to a draw...

43.♕xg6+ ♗g7 44.♕e6+ ♔h7 45.♕f5+ ♔g8 46.♕d5+ ♔h8 47.♕h5+ ♔g8 48.♕d5+ ♔h8 49.♕h5+ ♔g8 Draw.

This may be the worst game ever to appear in New In Chess. However, it was definitely the most critical moment of the tournament for me, reducing my event to one question: would I get over this game or not?

■ ■ ■

As Irina elaborated: 'Psychologically, that was definitely the lowest point of the tournament. I really saw it as a catastrophe. Later on, quite by chance, I ran into one of my Saint Louis supporters, and he kept repeating to me that it was all a 'minor setback', that I would come from behind like last year to win. The confidence that people had in me was a big help in getting past the trauma of this game.'

With seven titles under her belt, one may wonder what is next for her. 'The eighth title, what else? On a serious note, I would love to play in the open event, and I really enjoyed the several chances I had to do just that, twice in St. Louis, in 2009 and 2010, and once in Stillwater, Oklahoma, in 2007. But since the tournaments are running parallel to each other, the choice is pretty clear until money starts making no difference.

'About what is next for me… I have really spent my life as a player so far, but I think that in the future I will try to be more of an ambassador for chess by doing more promotional events, more commentary, videos, etc. Recently I have also started managing a programme called the Grandmaster School in NYC, which I run together with my coach Giorgi Kacheishvili and Tamaz Gelashvili. My job as manager is to keep our programme growing, and try to get as many of the talented kids as possible to go to our school. I really enjoy this project, because ultimately it's about passing on your knowledge and love for chess to the next generation. Three kids from our programme have qualified for World Youth, for example, one each in the U-8, U-10 and U-12 category.

'Of course it would help mainstream recognition if an American player played a match for the World Championship against Magnus Carlsen. You need someone to be the face of your sport. And the more chess is introduced at primary school level the better, since you're increasing your future pool of chess fans.' ■

> 'This may be the worst game ever to appear in New In Chess. However, it was definitely the most critical moment of the tournament for me'

St. Louis 2015 – women

					1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12		TPR
1	Irina Krush	IGM	USA	2477	*	0	½	1	½	1	1	½	1	1	1	1	8½	2431
2	Nazí Paikidze	IM	USA	2333	1	*	1	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	1	1	7½	2366
3	Katerina Nemcova	WGM	USA	2279	½	0	*	½	1	½	½	½	1	1	1	1	7½	2371
4	Viktorija Ni	WM	USA	2188	0	½	½	*	½	0	½	1	1	1	1	1	7	2348
5	Anna Sharevich	WGM	USA	2267	½	½	0	½	*	1	1	0	½	½	1	1	6½	2304
6	Rusudan Goletiani	IM	USA	2311	0	½	½	1	0	*	0	1	1	1	½	½	6	2271
7	Tatev Abrahamyan	WGM	USA	2322	0	½	½	½	0	1	*	1	0	1	0	1	5½	2234
8	Sabina-Francesca Foisor	WGM	USA	2276	½	½	½	0	1	0	0	*	1	1	½	½	5½	2238
9	Annie Wang	WM	USA	1901	0	½	0	0	½	0	1	0	*	½	1	0	3½	2139
10	Apurva Virkud	-	USA	2132	0	½	0	0	½	0	0	0	½	*	1	1	3½	2118
11	Alisa Melekhina	FM	USA	2235	0	0	0	0	0	½	1	½	0	0	*	½	2½	2031
12	Jennifer Yu	WFM	USA	2180	0	0	0	0	0	½	0	½	1	0	½	*	2½	2036

Fair & Square

Aaron David Miller: 'We're playing checkers on the Middle East game board and Tehran's playing three-dimensional chess. Iran has no problem reconciling its bad and contradictory behaviour while we twist ourselves into knots over our tough choices, all the while convincing ourselves that America's policy on the nuclear issue is on the right track.'
(The American Middle East analyst, on CNN)

The Philippines Business Mirror: 'To understand the way money moves around the world, think of a massive three-dimensional chessboard where there are dozens of countries/players competing at the same time. Not all players are equal. Some have many Queen pieces, while others do not have queens but instead have many weak pawns. The object of the game is still the same; to protect your home area while capturing the others' pieces and its territory.'
(In an editorial entitled 'The capital flow chess game' – April 14, 2015)

Matt Harvey: 'Pitching is a chess game – except you're throwing a chess piece at 96 mph.'
(The New York Bureau Chief for The Players' Tribune in his review of the new baseball documentary, Fastball)

H.G. Wells: 'There is no remorse like the remorse of chess.'

David Shenk: 'We face in our modern, splintered world not only a crisis in education, but more pointedly a crisis of understanding – of thought and of willingness to engage in thought. Thinking tools like chess help our minds expand, grow comfortable with abstraction and learn to navigate complex systems.'

Henrik Carlsen: 'Maybe it's also because he's quite good at chess.'
(On his son Magnus's impressive start to the 2nd Gashimov Memorial in Shamkir)

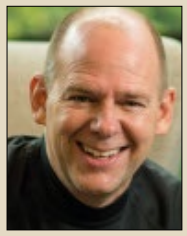
Ellen Carlsen: 'Casually walking by some games in the Chesspark, Santa Monica. First dude: 'Girls, you wanna play a game of chess?' Second dude: "Hahahaha."'
(A tweet from the World Champion's sister, as she enters the chess sexism debate)

Rex Sinquefield: 'I hope you beat those commies.'
(The Saint Louis chess benefactor after a chance meeting with Bobby Fischer on a flight in the early 1970s. 'I will', was Fischer's reply)

Vladimir Kramnik: 'I don't have any nostalgia for the time when chess was very popular in the USSR. (..) Why was chess so popular? Because the USSR, in contrast to other countries, didn't have a powerful entertainment industry. You came home, it was cold outside, you weren't going to take the dog for a walk, the television just had Brezhnev on all the channels, and you had to do something.'
(Last year in the weekly magazine Russian Reporter)

José Raul Capablanca: 'There is only one recipe. First of all there must be the willingness to study. Secondly, practice diligently and make it a point to meet stronger opponents. If that does not work, give it up. Be content to be a wood shifter. That, too, has its joys and compensations.'
(In an interview in the Brooklyn Daily Eagle, March 27, 1927, when asked what was the best way to improve at chess)

Edward Mills: 'Although kings and counts frequently amuse themselves with chess, few know what it represents. Chess offers an excellent example how rule and recreation interacted: as the original 'game of kings', it reveals how the élite of medieval French society learned, worked and played. In the texts where it appears, a game of chess can be a window onto society, a pleasant distraction, or even a test where the penalty for failure is death.'
(In a lecture on the function of chess in medieval French literature at the Medieval Postgraduate Conference 2015)



Mark Miller: 'As an organization expands, leaders who continue to play checkers when the name of the game is chess lose. In today's increasingly complex environment, leaders can no longer just react. They must evolve with their organization and learn to think strategically, look ahead and leverage every employee's specific talents.'
(The author and business motivational speaker in the foreword to his recently-published business book, Chess Not Checkers)

French proverb: 'You cannot play at chess if you are kind-hearted.'

‘My relatives and Paul Truong ruined my U.S. Championship’

interview Wesley So

His star keeps rising and he’s seen as a potential World Championship challenger. Yet the past months it was rarely his exceptional chess gift that placed Wesley So at the centre of heated online discussions. In an exclusive interview with **Dirk Jan ten Geuzendam**, the brand-new American tells his side of the story. About his new family, his natural mother, the scandals and the forfeit at his first U.S. Championship, and his trust in God. And why he left the SPICE program at Webster University to become a professional chess player.

When Wesley So speaks about ‘my mother’ or ‘my family’, you’re sometimes confused about who he is referring to – but only sometimes. Most of the time he refers to his new ‘Mom’ Lotis, her husband, former basketball player Bambi Kabigting, and their daughter Abbey, the family of Phil-

'God's people usually don't have
an easy life. God has big plans
for them, but the road is very long
and hard. Kind of the same as
the way I am taking right now.'

ippine origin in Minnesota that he moved in with at the end of last year. He invariably speaks about them with affection and heartfelt gratitude for the love they give him. Wesley usually only mentions his natural mother when he speaks about the difficult years he hopes to leave behind him and the conflicts and aggravations that came to a head during the recent U.S. Championships in St. Louis.

Still, it can be confusing. When I first met Lotis at the Tata Steel tournament in Wijk aan Zee last January and Wesley introduced her as 'my mother', I couldn't understand why there was no sign of recognition on her part. After all we had exchanged emails in 2010 when Wesley played in the Experience vs. Rising Stars in Amsterdam. Or so I thought. But those emails had been exchanged with his natural mother Eleanor, of course, and I vividly remembered them. As I was the tournament director, she informed me that Wesley, 16 years old at the time, would arrive 10(!) days early and asked if I could keep an eye on him. A bit perplexed I replied that I not only lived outside Amsterdam, but that I would also be too busy to really look after him. That would be no problem, she reassured me, as Wesley would be fine.

And it did look as if Wesley was fine when I picked him up at the airport and took him to the hotel he had booked, and when I called him a couple of times in the course of the following days. There was a supermarket next to the hotel where he bought food, he told me. And he occasionally went for a walk, but most of the time he spent studying chess with his computer and sleeping late.

But that was almost five years ago, and a lot has happened in the meantime – especially in the past few months. Wesley has entered the world's top 10 and become a U.S. citizen, boosting American hopes that with Hikaru Nakamura, Fabiano Caruana and him on board, the U.S. team can fight for gold at the 2016 Olympiad in Baku. Furthermore, last October

Wesley So
facts & figures

1992 Born October 9
2003 U-10 Philippine Champion
2005 Youngest Filipino IM ever
2006 Olympiad debut in Turin
2007 Youngest Filipino GM in history (at 14 years, one month and 28 days, at the time the 7th youngest ever in the world)
2008 shared first in Dubai Open
2009 wins Wijk aan Zee C Group
2009 knocks out Ivanchuk and Kamsky in World Cup
2009 Philippine Champion
2012 joins SPICE program at Webster University, St. Louis
2012 wins Quebec International
2013 shared first Reykjavik Open
2014 wins Capablanca Memorial
2014 wins Millionaire Chess
2014 October, leaves Webster
2014 November, switches to U.S. Chess Federation
2015 shared second Wijk aan Zee

he decided to become a professional chess player and, embittered by several conflicts and by what he experienced as an atmosphere of psychological terror, he left the chess program at Webster University run by Susan Polgar and her husband Paul Truong.

Against this background, Wesley So's debut at the U.S. Championship was eagerly awaited. And headlines he certainly made, but instead of being about his expected rivalry with Nakamura they were about scandalous incidents that ruined his tournament. His natural mother Eleanor and an aunt turned up in St. Louis, urging him to go back to Webster University, a wish that was supported by an avalanche of aggressive posts on the Internet by Truong, who evidently was not happy that the Webster team had lost its star player. Under all this pressure Wesley did poorly in the championship, and to cap it all he was forfeited in Round 9 for making notes during the game.

I talk about all this with Wesley and Lotis in Shamkir, during the tournament in memory of Vugar Gashimov. After all the commotion in St. Louis they've had a wonderfully quiet time here, and although Wesley is disappointed that he could not follow up on his great 3½-out-of-4 start, he is motivated for his upcoming events and says that he looks forward to returning to St. Louis for the Sinquefield Cup in late August.

But first I ask him to clarify his 'family situation' for our readers.

'My real parents live in Canada right now. In 2010, when they emigrated to Canada, I stayed behind in the Philippines. It was a bad idea, I was only 16 and they should never have allowed me to live by myself. After that I never really lived with them, apart from some short visits, so we kind of grew apart. And then, in 2012, I went to university in the States. I think we never had a good family relationship. I just kind of feel regret and resentment that they left me alone. My real mother doesn't think that being a chess player is a real profession, because she doesn't play. Her visit to St. Louis was only the second or third time that she'd ever been to a chess tournament.

'I was studying for a finance degree and when I first arrived there, I was not very serious about my chess profession. But starting last year my ranking grew, and in the end it just didn't make sense for me to study finance when I could start a chess career.'

In the meantime you had found a new family. How did that happen?
'When I was 19, more than two years ago, I went to play a weekend tournament in Minneapolis. I was staying with a Filipino friend and we had dinner and they came over.'

Lotis fills in: 'They were friends of ours and it was a small private thing. Funnily enough, I don't go out very much, but that night the three of us decided to go, and Wesley and my daughter Abbey became good friends from there. And when he went back to Webster, he asked permission to text. She talked to me about it, because they were both young, and I said, he seems like a nice boy. They texted every day, skyping, being friends. And then he didn't have anywhere to go for Christmas and he asked if he could come to Minnesota. And that year he started coming to visit quite often. Sometimes he would just show up, and we'd go get him at the airport.'

On the opposing page: Wesley and Abbey having fun spotting remarkable places and snow tubing.

On this page the Christmas photo that upset Wesley So's coaches at Webster. Third from right: Lotis Key. On the far right her husband Bambi Kabigting.

Wesley: 'I'd been to Minneapolis six times before I moved in. I went to the State Fair, which happens once a year, one of the biggest State Fairs in the United States. It was really nice. During my first visit to Minneapolis I noticed that people there were very friendly. I really had a great time, so I enjoyed coming back for Christmas. We went snow tubing. Many people think that it's kind of strange that I moved in with my family after only meeting with them for a short time, less than two years, but at the same time, many things are strange. I am very glad to be with them, because they have taught me a lot. I mean, my real parents didn't really visit me when I was at university. It's very hard to move and live in a new country.

'We feel very connected and very close. I feel they're my family. They have taught me many things and helped me to become an adult. Maybe the next thing will be learning to drive…'

Lotis: 'Biking first.'

Wesley (with a smile): 'Yes, biking first. You know, I missed quite a lot when I was growing up, because growing up in the Philippines compared to the United States is very different.'

Lotis: 'We noticed when he started visiting more and more that there were a number of things, normal things for our children, that he had not been exposed to. We have a lot of experience with children. We ran a ministry in the Philippines, we sent over 60 children to school. I was born in the United States, my father is English, but I grew up in the Philippines, my mother is a Filipino. My husband is a hundred per cent Filipino, but he is a very big man so people don't realize that he is a Filipino.'

> 'Many people think that it's kind of strange that I moved in with my family after only meeting with them for a short time, less than two years.'

Wesley: 'If you grow up as a chess player you focus on one thing. It's easy to miss several important things in life. Many things. Just living in the United States… Like this year we were fixing my taxes, which is very complicated as a professional chess player. Now I will be learning to drive, having a credit card, normal things like that. We read books regularly…'

Lotis: 'I am teaching him to write. He was never focused on verbal communication. We tend to know about kids and we saw that he was a lonely, sort of displaced child, and I saw him begin to spiral downwards last year, emotionally, not in his ratings. He wanted to live with a family, he wanted something more…'

Wesley: 'I am very happy that I met them. When I first met you (looking at Lotis) I was 2700 and you helped me a lot with my chess career. I am trying to be more professional.'

Some years ago you told me about the importance of religion for you.
Wesley: 'We are Christians and I have always believed in God. I read the Bible. This was already so.'

Lotis: 'We are a church-going family, so when he came to us, I said, we go to church on Sunday. You have to go. And he was like, yeah, I want to go. So he got involved with our church family, bible study. I mean, we have a normal regular American life. And he fits into it perfectly.'

When you went to Webster, didn't you find a family there? Because that is the way the university team is portrayed…
'Webster certainly. At the same time, family is a big word and I don't think you can be a family with such a big group of around 15 players. Eventually students move on.'

How did you end up there?
'I played in the SPICE tournament in 2009, which was Susan Polgar's tournament at Texas Tech, and I got an invitation to the university. I was thinking about that offer but didn't accept it till late 2011. So I started in 2012 (when Susan Polgar and her husband and business partner Paul Truong had moved to Webster University in St. Louis – DJtG). I had no regrets about moving to a new country, it was a really great experience…'

Did you already have plans to change your nationality?
'No, I had no plans when I came. It was just first things first, get an education, and since my rating was improving at that point, I decided to study. At the same time, when I first came to Webster, I had no idea of how Paul Truong is or how he can be. I was very innocent.'

What did your week there look like? How much time did you spend on chess and how much on studies?
'As a full-time student you have to take at least 13 credit hours per week, so between 13 and 18. I was rooming with a strong grandmaster, Ray Robson. I think that really helped my chess a lot. At first, when I moved to the United States, I didn't play so many tournaments. We only have to play for the school in December and April, and as those months came closer we'd work harder. Although I must say that Ray Robson is not the most hard-working roommate (laughs). And during the first year I bought a PlayStation and that didn't help either.'

'In my opinion, winning is more important for the coaches than for the players..'

How important was it to win the championship?
'The college championship is called the Pan American. The first year it was very exciting. Webster was the top seed and of course we all wanted to win and I worked hard for it. In my opinion, winning is more important for the coaches than for the players. That's why Susan Polgar was kind of nervous during the critical rounds.'

And the family life you longed for was not provided by the coaches?
'Well, they're not really my friends and they were mostly helping me with chess, not with other parts of life. I think it is hard for me to live all by myself. Of course the coaches are there, but there are other players too.

Do you remember when was your first conflict with the coaches or, more specifically, with Paul Truong?
'Early 2014 was the first time, after I visited Minnesota and they found out that I was spending a lot of time talking and chatting. I am not sure why, but they didn't seem to be too happy when they learned about it.'

Lotis: 'We took a photo at Christmas and as a gift to him we had the photo framed and sent it to him after he left. The first hint of conflict was that he showed them the photo, and I remember that he wrote to me: I don't know why, but their faces changed and they are not happy about my picture.'

Wesley: 'Around the same time my chess career improved. I was getting more serious, and Paul and Susan somehow became stricter, and they thought that being with Lotis and the family was taking time away from my chess. Which really it wasn't, I mean… Chess training is not all

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about chess work. I think it was February 2014 they told me to cut relations, basically because it was taking away time from my chess. I didn't like this, they telling me what to do. Then they cut my phone, changed my number and forced me to send a letter. Paul wrote it. It was heart-breaking, and one week later I ran away and came to Minneapolis.'

Lotis: 'It was a very cruel letter. We had a plan to meet for Valentine's, he wanted us to come to school. The whole family had rented a house and we were supposed to spend the weekend there. And the day before he sent this long email to us saying: I don't want to talk to you again, I can't see you anymore, sorry for everything. And then he changed his phone number and cut us completely dead. We were just horrified. So we cancelled everything.

'I thought, this boy is insane. He's the one who's asked us to come there, we rented a house, we took time off from work… Ten days later he called us and said: I am coming, and he went to the airport in a cab, threw some frozen food in his suitcase with his clothes and came over to our house for 10 days.'

Wesley: 'Paul and Susan were very upset, because they realized I had gone to Minneapolis even though they had forbidden me to go. I was supposed to have a match with Leinier Dominguez, rapid and blitz, on March 11, 2014, and so to punish me they made Ray play instead. And he lost the match. But I had to go back, because I was on a student visa. I was not afraid to go back, not really, because the worst they could do was revoke my scholarship. I wasn't really familiar with how crazy Paul Truong can be. Things continued as they were before. They kind of made me promise that I wouldn't talk with my family again, so then I started to talk to Lotis secretly, by phone or by skype.'

But didn't you feel that this was totally ridiculous?

NEW IN CHESS

Lotis Key and Wesley So listening to a press conference in Shamkir.

'Well, they were threatening to revoke my scholarship. I don't think they can. But Paul Truong even threatens things that he cannot do. He can be very threatening, like you do this and this will happen… Besides taking away the scholarship, he threatened me he would fine me, that I'd have to pay them money if I went to Minneapolis.'

Lotis: 'And they told him they had the right to tell him who he could talk to and who he couldn't. When he told me that, I told him: in America everybody has the right to talk to anybody.'

Wesley: 'The worst emails came in October last year, and I moved at the end of that month. Those emails were the ones that convinced me that it was time to move on. Around that time I got my green card. This I did mostly by myself. I mean, Susan Polgar wrote the letter of recommendation, which is a necessary requirement, and she kind of helped me arrange some paperwork, like appointments and things. But I had to pay for everything and do all the paperwork. I hired a lawyer and paid close to 9,000 dollars.'

Did the other members of the Webster team realize what was happening?

'When I told them that I would be leaving, they were kind of surprised, but at the same time it was my decision. I told them that there were false emails and threats, but they just thought it was some misunderstanding and Paul is not really upset, he just talks like that. That's how he is. I talked with Georg Meier, who is one of my previous team mates, and he said that Paul often has strange ways, and it either has to be his way or the highway. Either you agree with him or he completely argues with you.

'Those were really terrible emails. I talked with some American students and they said, you know, this is illegal. His threats are extreme and at the same time I don't think it's allowed by the university. And so at the end of the day I had my green card and I had just won Vegas and I think it was a good time to move on.'

Lotis: 'When he decided to leave Webster, I said: if you want to live here, that's fine, because I can't imagine leaving a kid with that guy.'

Wesley: 'And that was also when I decided to become a professional.'

In the weeks that followed Paul Truong continued to send threatening emails. To give you an idea of the nature of those emails I will give you some fragments from a long and intimidating letter to Wesley:

'Organizers worldwide, from Holland, Germany, China, Norway, Czech Republic, Hungary, France,

Who is Susan Polgar?

The correspondence with Paul Truong that Lotis Key and Wesley So allowed me to read, also once again raises the question about the extent to which Susan Polgar is involved in all the activities and projects that carry her name. Paul Truong makes no bones about saying that he has been and is her co-author in most of her publications, but how much does he leave for her to write or say at all? The first time I was confronted by this question was 10 years ago, when I wrote Susan an email about the simul world record that she had set. I had been contacted by the previous record-holder, Andrew Martin, who had rightly pointed out that if you divided the time the exhibition had lasted by the total number of games, the inescapable conclusion had to be that on average the games had lasted less than a minute. A friendly reply, signed by Susan, arrived within a quarter of an hour. Unfortunately it didn't touch on any of the questions I had asked and, worse, it was absolutely clear to me that the reply had been written by Paul Truong and not by Susan, whom I had known for many years.

According to Wesley So, Truong once explained to him that marriage is a business arrangement, and perhaps writing in your wife's name is part of such an arrangement (they got married in 2007). Still, it is remarkable that they (or he) have become less and less secretive about the arrangement. During the 2013 World Cup in Tromsø, the ceaseless tweets that were sent out under Susan Polgar's name didn't stop when she was commentating live and it was clear to everyone who wanted to see that they were written by Truong.

Russia, to St. Louis, etc. do ask us about your character. As I told you, organizers do share information, whether you like it or not. It is the same with people you work with in chess. It is a small world. Most cannot keep their mouths shut. People already know who you are training with, and some even know what you are working on. Everything you say to them will come back to me, as well as to others in the chess circle. There are spies everywhere, especially at top level.'

'How soon do you think it will take the organizers/media to find out during Tata Steel that other people, and not your real family in Toronto, will be in Wijk aan Zee, especially when your Mother (Leny) has corresponded with them many times in the past? How do you think the organizer/media will feel when they find out how you are treating your real family?'

> 'I was shocked, as I had been looking forward to my first U.S. championship.'

'I know you will share my email with your representative (not a smart idea, legally speaking) as you have done repeatedly in the past. But this is your life and you will continue to blunder until one day things will blow up in your face. I have nothing to hide. I am proud of everything Susan and I have done for you since you joined SPICE. I have no problem if the truth comes out. Can you say the same about your conduct, behaviour, or integrity? Do you think you can fool everyone forever?'

Paul Truong didn't send an email to the organizers in Wijk aan Zee about the way Wesley So treated his real family, but they did receive an email from Eleanor So in which she sketched the situation from her perspective. Whether Truong had anything to do with this email is speculative, but there is good reason to believe that he was involved in her visit to St. Louis during the U.S. Championship. Her presence was embarrassing for Wesley, as she was urging him to go back to university. One day this led to an unpleasant scene in front of the St. Louis chess club, where the championship was taking place, and after that scene his relatives were banned from the club. But they didn't leave St. Louis, much to Wesley's annoyance.

'I was shocked, as I had been looking forward to my first U.S. championship. As I had recently switched federations, it was an extremely important tournament in view of my rivalry with Hikaru. But the evening that we arrived, someone called us to our room. It was two of my relatives, my aunt, who lives in Boston, and my biological mother. Apparently they had been convinced by Paul Truong to come, at my biggest tournament ever. We learned that the hotel room they were staying in had been booked under Paul Truong's name.'

Lotis: 'Things went from bad to worse, because they began a lot of arguing with Wesley. They had big, big arguments with a lot of crying, a lot of screaming, shouting. They followed us down the street, trying to grab him and drag him. By the time he had them banned from the club, he was a nervous wreck.'

Paul Truong tried to prove that he had not booked the hotel room for Eleanor So by publishing an email that he said he had received from the front desk manager of the Chase Plaza in St. Louis. With the hotel's letterhead and all it looks authentic, but the text of the email cannot fail to raise suspicions. It's a short message saying:

CHESSDOM

The Webster team in Las Vegas: (l. to r.) Ray Robson, Susan Polgar, Paul Truong, Wesley So, Le Quang Liem and Ashwin Jayaram.

'Good Afternoon Mr. Truong, I am writing to let you know that we do not have any past or future reservations under your name. If there is anything else I can do for you, please let me know. Best (followed by all the details of the front desk manager)' These two lines and nothing else.

The first question that comes to mind when reading these lines is: to what question/message could this possibly be a reply? And would any hotel official not include the question he/she is replying to in the answer? Isn't this a funny message? Perhaps it isn't, but in any case I never got a reply from the front desk manager when I wrote to him at the address that Paul Truong used and asked him to confirm that the email that was published online (and therefore in a way got him involved) was genuine.

And then, as if he had not gone through enough emotional turmoil already, Wesley So was forfeited in Round 9 of the U.S. Championship for making notes during the game. Having been warned in the early rounds that he could not write notes on his score-sheet, he thought he was clever by writing them on a separate piece of paper he had brought for that purpose. Sadly for him, this was not allowed either, and applying the rules the arbiter forfeited him. It was a decision that could not be argued with and still it felt harsh. After all, Wesley So had been writing notes to himself before. In Wijk aan Zee I noticed how at the start of every round he would scribble the same reminders to himself at the bottom of his score-sheet: Never break your rules! Just sit down for the entire game, never get up! Double-check and triple-check! Always use your time, you have a lot of it!

'Since I've been living by myself, I started having this little habit of writing notes to myself. I am a very emotional person who does things impulsively. I go to a town and then maybe think of another town and go there. I am very impulsive. When I think of something, I have to do it or get it right away. It's a strange habit of mine, I am kind of weird that way, I write notes to myself most of the time.'

Lotis: 'Wash your hair, don't forget to eat food.'

Wesley: 'Something like that. I would usually bring a piece of paper with notes on it. Then somebody told me I shouldn't write on a piece of paper, it might be cheating. So eventually, it's kind of silly, I decided to write on my score-sheet so that everybody could see it. I did it in Tata Steel, I did it in Vegas and there were no problems until I came to St. Louis.'

Lotis: 'When he is under stress, our house starts to bloom with little torn pieces of paper. In shoes, in drawers, on tables, in books, with little motivational notes saying, don't forget… Focus, eat fruit, don't get fat.

'That's why we cut the Internet. He would be studying chess and then leap up to look at the NBA scores. Or he'd leap up to go to the refrigerator to get a drink. And I told him he was training his mind for short focus, because you're rewarding yourself for short focus. And he is totally cured. The moment we cut the Internet, I think it was only a day and it was, oh I am glad I don't have to answer to this or that.'

Wesley: 'I think I made little notes, because it reminds me during the game. For example, I would promise myself that I would be entirely focused, but during time-trouble I kind of forget these things, and play fast moves. For me this worked well in some events.

In Round 9, playing against Akobian, I decided to be a bit more tricky, since the arbiter told me I couldn't write anything on my score-sheet, I brought a piece of paper with me. I had decided several hours before the game that I would do it. Of course, I had no idea they would forfeit me.'

Lotis: 'Now we got it under control. We had a really serious talk about it.'

Wesley: 'Yeah. I probably won't do it again.'

Lotis: 'Not probably.'

Wesley: 'No, I won't do it again. But I can say that my relatives and Paul really ruined my U.S. championship. The first days we were not talking about my opponents, we were just talking about my family problems. It was very stressful and everything just went wrong. I lost to some kid (referring to his loss against Sam Sevian – DJtG).'

What would you say to Paul Truong now?

'Leave us alone. I am trying to have a good career, trying to be one of the best chess players in the world. Which by itself is very hard, but with all these distractions it's virtually impossible.'

People often wonder how different he is from the public persona of Susan Polgar. Do you blame Susan for anything or are they one person?
'I think that basically Paul Truong controls Susan Polgar. I mean, he is the one who writes the blog and probably most of her emails as well, because I have seen him do it. I think that Susan by herself would not even have thought of such things like threatening emails or making my relatives come. But, I mean, at the same time she is his wife and she knows absolutely everything he is doing. If she is really good and great, she would have prevented Paul from doing some of the bad things he did.'

But then you suggest she is being kept hostage by him…
'I wouldn't say hostage. Personally I have seen them argue, and even though she would have different opinions sometimes, it's usually Paul who gets his way. With Paul it's either his way or you're his enemy.'

Lotis: 'And let me add something that is very important: we do not work for Wesley. I am not his coach, not his manager. I come with him at my own expense. We pay for everything. In our home he only pays for the basics of his own career. But he lives with us like a child of the family. We do not take a penny from him. There has been so much gossip that we are getting money from Wesley. First of all, my family is well to do. Everything you see, my travelling, I pay for that myself. All the money that he earns goes into his own account, we don't take a penny for anything.'

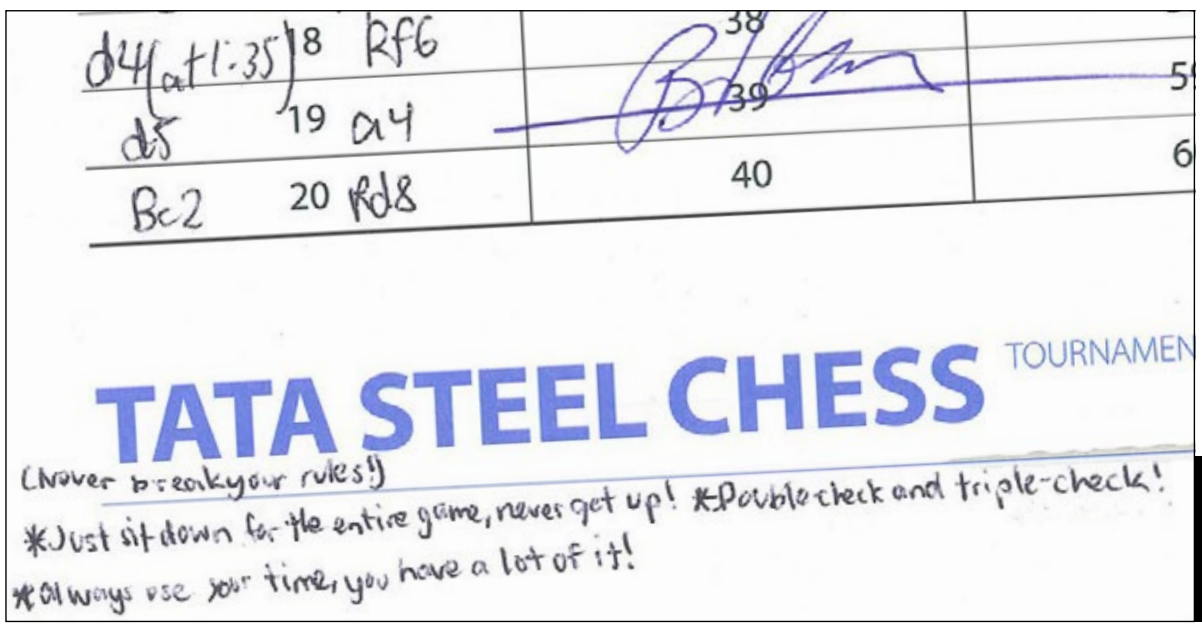
Wesley: 'They are doing it for love. That's what many people find really strange… It's a big misunderstanding. I'm just starting as a chess professional. I don't think much about money, that's not my priority. Paul and Susan recently wrote a book, *Rich as a King*, because money is a huge focus for them. Although he was bankrupt a few years ago (according to the cover of *Rich as a King, How the Wisdom of Chess Can Make You a Grandmaster of Investing*, the book was written by Susan Polgar and Douglas Goldstein, an international investment advisor – DJtG).'

Lotis: 'He was bankrupt twice. It's an insult to us that we took in a child because he is going to make some money one day maybe. And he writes his own emails and he is writing better and better, because I teach him. And if people say, that's not him, he's changed, yes, he's changed, he's growing.'

We've talked for one and a half hours and it's time for dinner. As we get up, Wesley picks up the Bible that he had with him and that he had put on the windowsill. He says he always has a book with him and it's usually the Bible. 'The Bible has a lot of great stories, about people. It's like a novel, a real-life novel. I find it a great way to de-stress myself after the game.'

Which are the stories you like best?
'One thing you notice about the Bible is that God's people usually don't have an easy life. God has big plans for them, but the road is very long and hard. Kind of the same as the way I am taking right now. In my career at least the road to the top is very hard and you have to suffer painful losses. It sometimes does not go as you had hoped it would go. For example, I have no idea why I scored only one point in the last four games here. And sometimes I wonder what I should do to improve, or whether I should just take it one day at the time. And my family is very supportive. You can't realize your dreams alone, so that's why I am very happy that they are here.'

Postscript:
During the interview Wesley So referred to an issue that further complicates his relation with his natural parents. From the moment he started winning prizes when he was 10 years old, they put this money in a bank account for him. Now that he is 21 he has asked them to give him access to his life savings. His mother's only answer was to suggest that he come to Canada, which he rejected after the experience in St. Louis. As his parents are not forthcoming, he has decided to hire a lawyer to gain access to his savings. His lawyer thinks that part of the money may be gone and before going to court he has made an offer to negotiate a repayment plan. As we go to press there is no answer yet and Wesley So may soon face another battle that he'd be happy to avoid. ■


d4(at1:35) 18 Rf6
d5 19 a4
Bc2 20 Rd8
38
39
40
TATA STEEL CHESS
TOURNAMEN
(Never break your rules!)
*Just sit down for the entire game, never get up! *Double check and triple-check!
*Always use your time, you have a lot of it!

The notes that Wesley So wrote to himself on his scoresheet every day in Wijk aan Zee.

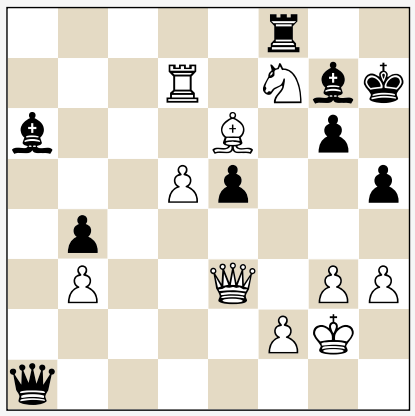
MAXIMize your Tactics

with Maxim Notkin

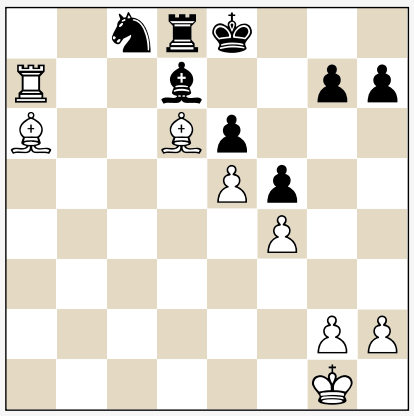
NEW IN CHESS * TRAINING *

Find the best move in the positions below

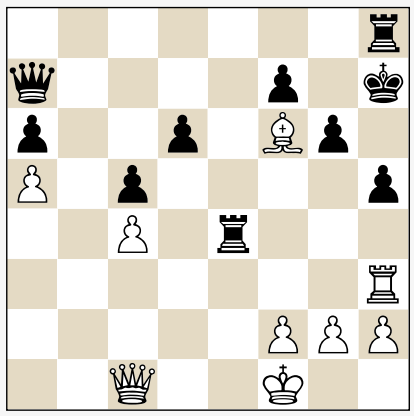
Solutions on page 101



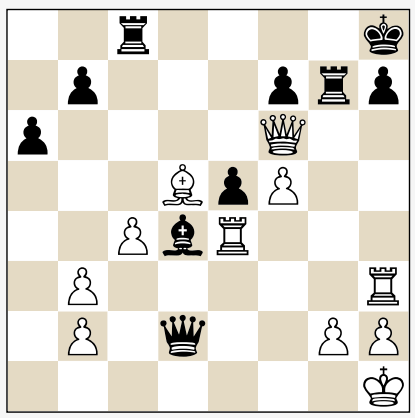
1. White to play



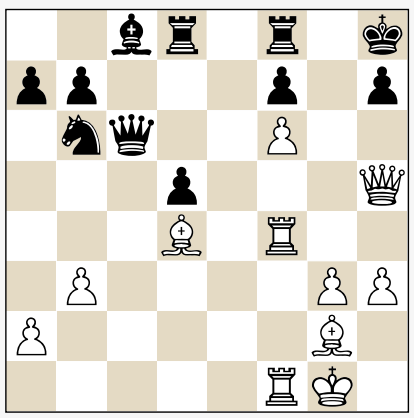
2. White to play



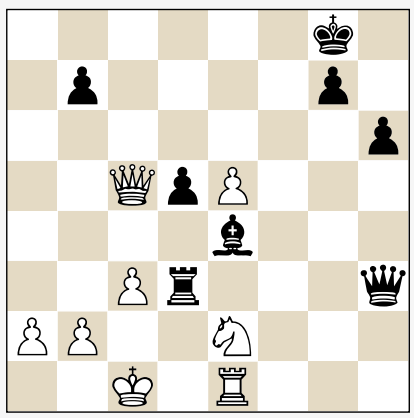
3. White to play



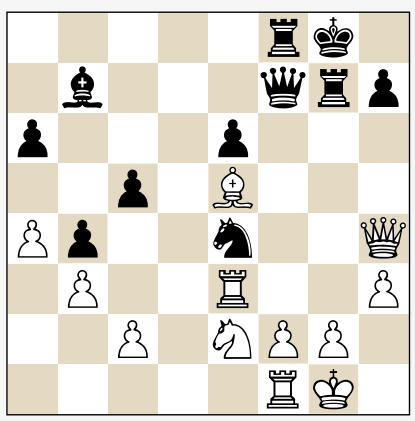
4. White to play



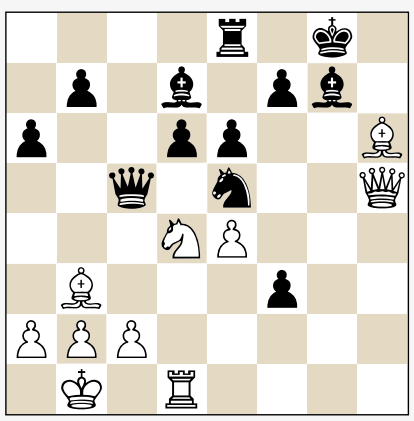
5. White to play



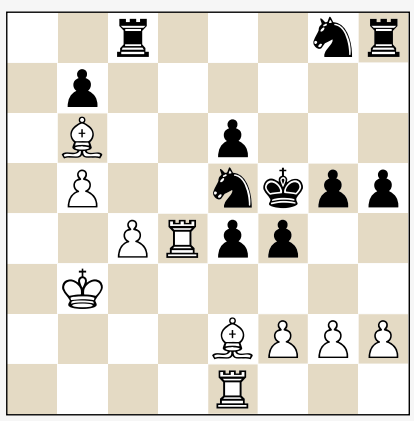
6. Black to play



7. Black to play



8. White to play

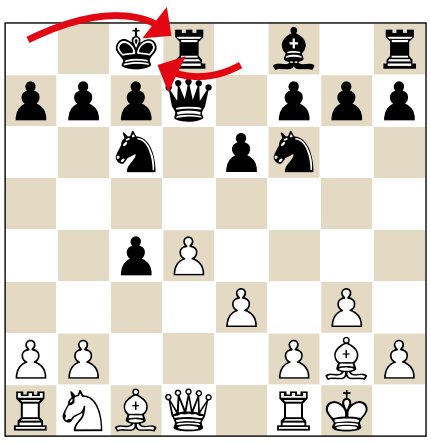


9. White to play

SECRETS OF OPENING SURPRISES

Castling Queenside to avoid Catalan Torture

Jeroen Bosch



9...0-0-0!?

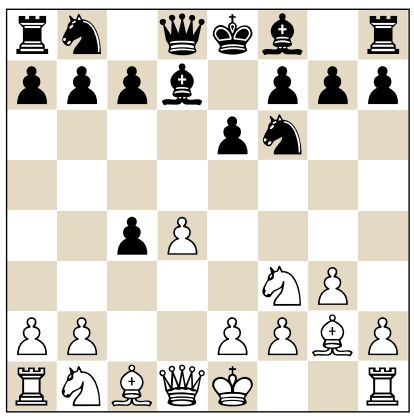
'A perfect antidote. Let's castle queenside against the "boring" Catalan and play for three results!'

In the older chess literature, the Ruy Lopez was often referred to as the 'Spanish torture'. It strikes me that with the advent of the Berlin Wall such references have become much rarer. These days, however, players of the Queen's Gambit find themselves confronted with a type of inquisition far more frequently, to wit, the Catalan.

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3

Take, for example, the recent games Kramnik-Adams, Shamkir 2015, and Adams-Anand, Baden-Baden 2015. In both cases White converted a better double rook ending to a superior single rook ending to take the full point home. However, my point here is not that the Catalan is strong, but that Black is playing for two results only. He has hardly any chances to win in a 'boring' position. In this article I want to present you a perfect antidote: let's castle queenside and play for three results! Interestingly, this approach has increasingly found favour with strong grandmasters too.

4...dxc4 5.♗g2 ♗d7



A modest-looking move, but one with a clear strategic purpose: Black wants to oppose White's Catalan bishop as soon as possible.

6.♘e5

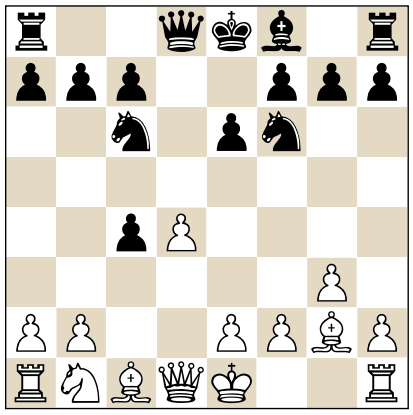
This is supposed to be the acid test, and the reason why 5...♗d7 is frowned upon. Black is fine after the alternatives:

■ 6.♕c2 c5 7.0-0 (Black was better after 7.♕xc4 ♗c6 8.0-0 ♘bd7 9.♘c3 ♖c8 10.♗e3?! b5! 11.♕d3 b4 12.♘b1 c4 in Radjabov-Anand, Stavanger 2013) 7...♗c6 8.dxc5 (8.♕xc4 ♘bd7 transposes) 8...♗xc5 9.♕xc4 ♘bd7 10.♘c3 ♖c8 is completely OK for Black and a position which is usually reached via 5...c5 6.♕a4+ (innocent) 6...♗d7 7.♕xc4 ♗c6, and so on.

■ 6.♘bd2, and now the customary answer is 6...♗b4 7.♕c2 (after 7.0-0 7...♗xd2 8.♗xd2 ♗c6 is playable, and 7...♗b5 is interesting) 7...♗b5 8.0-0 ♘c6, as in the stem game Sosonko-Kortchnoi, Wijk aan Zee 1984. The recent 6...♗b5!? 7.0-0 (7.♘e5 is more critical) 7...♘c6 8.♘b1 ♗e7 9.♘c3 ♗a6 10.♕a4 0-0 11.♖d1 ♘d5 12.a3 ♘b6 13.♕c2 ♘a5 14.e4 ♘b3 favoured Black in Li Chao-Zhang, Ho Chi Minh City 2015.

6...♗c6 7.♘xc6 ♘xc6

Black has 'solved' his eternal problem in the Catalan in a radical way by giving up his light-squared bishop in an early stage of the game.



8.0-0

Nothing is gained by 8.♕a4 ♕d7 9.♕xc4 ♘xd4! (9...0-0-0!? is interesting here too!) 10.♗xb7 ♖b8 11.♗g2 ♗b4+ 12.♘d2 0-0, and Black has everything developed and can look at the future with confidence (in the database his score is superior).

It is possible to play 8.e3 ♕d7 instead: 9.♕e2 (when 9.0-0 transposes to our main line) 9...e5 10.0-0 exd4 11.exd4+ ♗e7 12.♕xc4 0-0 more or less equalizes on the spot, while 10...0-0-0 11.♕xc4 exd4 12.exd4 ♘xd4, Hjartarson-Piket, Tilburg 1989, is for the more adventurous spirits amongst us.

White has trouble equalizing after 8.♗xc6+ bxc6 9.♕a4 ♕d5 10.0-0 ♕b5.

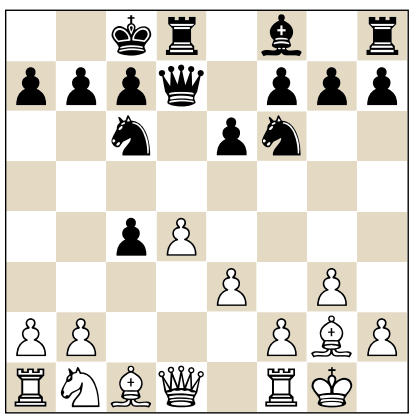
8...♕d7

Here Black should not be materialistic, as 8...♘xd4 9.♗xb7 ♖b8 10.♗g2 ♕d7 11.e3 ♘f5 12.♕c2 is an edge for White. After the text Black does threaten to take the d-pawn.

9.e3 White has to keep his d-pawn if he wants to prove anything.

9.♘c3 ♘xd4 10.♗xb7 ♖b8 11.♗g2 ♗e7 12.e3 ♘b5 13.♕c2 ♘xc3 14.♕xc3 ♕b5! is an old recipe from the 12th World Champion to easily equalize, Jussupow-Karpov, Belfort 1988.

9...0-0-0!



Attaboy! Black plays in true gung-ho style, and that's how we like our SOS chess. However, before you think that this type of move is only played in coffeehouses, allow me to quote Boris Avrukh in his 2015 update of *Grandmaster Repertoire 1. d4* volume 1A: this is 'currently the most fashionable continuation at grandmaster level'.

Please note that we very much want to avoid the main line 9...♖b8 10.♕e2 b5 11.b3 cxb3 12.axb3.

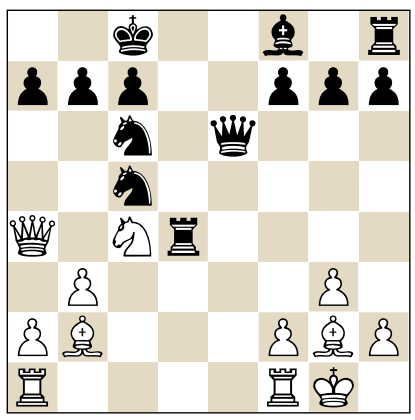
10.♕a4

White finally prepares to win back the pawn and directs his queen towards Black's king.

■ The other logical way to retrieve the pawn is **10.♘d2**.

– Now Black may certainly consider the crude approach: **10...h5** 11.♘xc4 h4 12.♕a4 hxg3 13.hxg3 ♘d5 14.♗d2 ♔b8 15.♖fc1 f5 16.♘a5 (16.b4) 16...♘xa5 17.♕xd7 ♖xd7 18.♗xa5, and Black was a touch better and won in Kreisl-Grachev, Aix-les-Bains 2011. More dangerous though is 12.b4 ♗xb4 13.♕b3, when White appears to be faster, Grigoriants-Socko, Khanty-Mansiysk 2012. Note that with castling on opposite wings it is no real achievement for Black to 'win' the b-pawn, as this merely opens files towards his own king.

– With the knight on d2, Black probably has a much cleaner way by striking in the centre with **10...e5!?**. Now 11.♕a4 exd4 12.exd4 a6! 13.♗xc6 (13.♘xc4 ♘xd4) 13...♕xc6 14.♕xc6 bxc6 15.♘xc4 ♖xd4 was nothing for White in Meier-Nisipeanu, Baden Baden 2014, while 11.♘xc4 exd4 12.exd4 ♕e6! 13.♕a4 ♖xd4 14.b3 ♘e4 15.♗b2 ♘c5



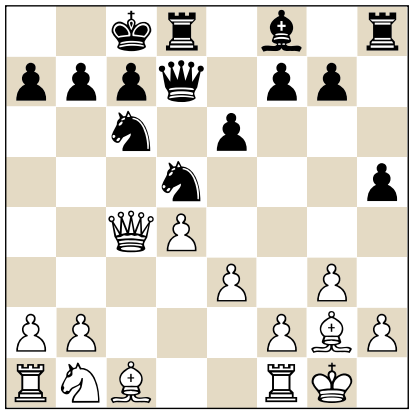
was a very concrete way to deal with the complexities of the position. White's queen is trapped, but after 16.♕xc6 bxc6 17.♗xd4 he has enough positional compensation for the lost material, Giri-Harikrishna, Biel 2014.

■ Directing the queen onto the long diagonal does not seem to be dangerous for Black: 10.♕f3 ♘d5 was satisfactory in practice but also worthy of serious consideration is 10...e5!?, since 11.dxe5 ♘g4 favours Black.

10...♘d5 I like this final preparatory move before Black lashes out with ...h5. Black more or less forces White to take on c4 with the queen (otherwise 11... ♘b6 would be strong).

The problem with the immediate 10...h5!? is that White gains time to take on c4 with the knight after 11.♘d2!, Stefanova-M.Socko, Warsaw 2013. Although instead of 11...♘d5 here 11...h4!? could be an improvement.

11.♕xc4 h5

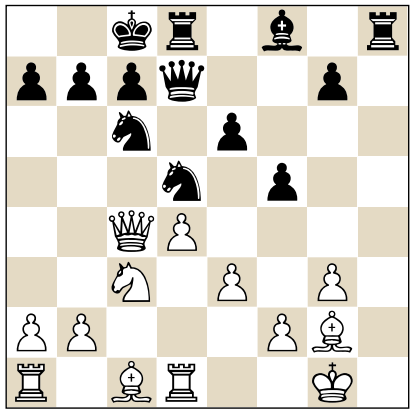


This is the real tabiya for this SOS line. White can boast of a powerful unopposed Catalan bishop which, just as in the Dragon, both defends and attacks. Black, on the other hand, has an edge in development and a clear target on the kingside. Ever since the game Kreisl-Grachev (as quoted above) I had stored this idea away in my SOS file. It is interesting that Avrukh's *Grandmaster Repertoire 1.d4 Volume 1* from 2008 does not even mention 9...0-0-0, while his 2015 update has promoted castling as the main line. Considering the popularity of Avrukh's repertoire choices it makes sense to deal with his main line 12.♗d2 in detail (see Variation B), and I will also consider 12.♘c3 (A).

Variation A

12.♘c3 h4 13.♗d2

White has also tried 13.♖d1 hxg3 14.hxg3 f5

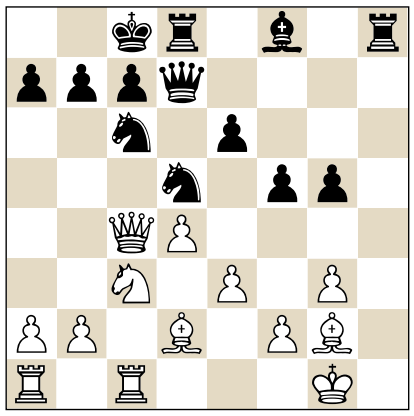


and now: 15.♕e2 (15.a3 g5 16.e4 ♘b6 17.♕e2 f4! Erdogdu-Wirig, Plovdiv 2010) 15...♗b4!? 16.♗d2 ♔b8 17.♖ac1 ♗xc3!? 18.bxc3 ♘f6 19.♖b1 ♘e4 20.♗e1 g5 21.♕b5 b6 22.c4 g4 23.a4 ♘e7 24.a5 ♕xb5 25.♖xb5 ♘g5! 26.axb6 axb6 27.c5 ♘f3+! was double-edged but equal in Sandipan-Hracek, Germany Bundesliga 2012/13.

13...hxg3 14.hxg3

Or 14.fxg3 f5, and Black is no worse.

14...f5 15.♖fc1 g5

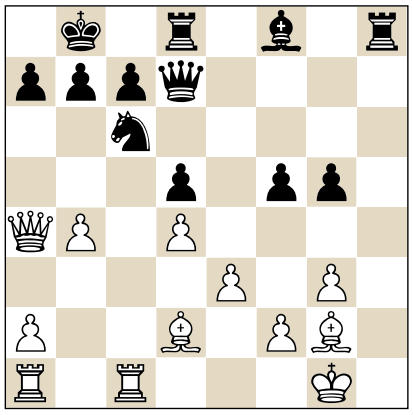


You should remember this approach. Black just opens the h-file and plays ...f5 and ...g5. The advance of the pawns introduces the tactical threat of ...f4 or the positional threat of ...g4; it also gains the control over square e4 and prepares a future ...♕h7.

16.♕a4 ♔b8 17.♘xd5 exd5 18.b4

In Galopoulos-Kapnisis, Vrachati 2011, the players agreed to a quick draw after 18.♖c2 ♖h6 19.♖ac1 ♘b4 20.♕xd7 ♖xd7 21.♗xb4 ♗xb4 22.f4 gxf4 ½-½.

The text is more ambitious, but it is actually the first player who should watch out in this position.

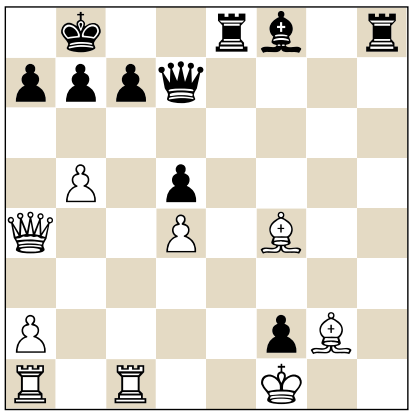


18...♗d6!

This most recently played move is a correct pawn sacrifice, but Black is spoilt for choice:

– 18...♘e7 19.♕xd7 ♖xd7, Filip-Swiercz, Paleochora 2012, is a nearly equal endgame.

– 18...f4 19.b5 ♘xd4! 20.exd4 (20.♕xd4 ♗g7∓) 20...fxg3 is extremely sharp: 21.♗xg5? (stronger are 21.f3 or 21.♕b3 gxf2+ 22.♔f1) 21...gxf2+ 22.♔f1 ♖e8 23.♗f4?, Xu Jun-Rodshtein, Gibraltar 2015, and here

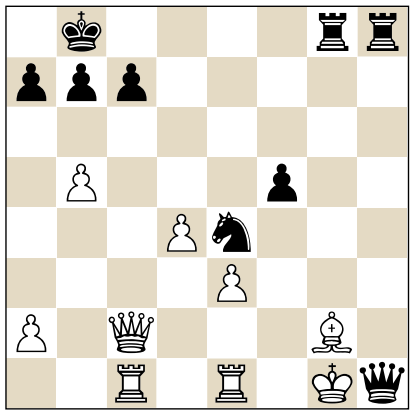


23...♗d6! would have left White without a defence.

19.b5?

Better was 19.♗xd5 ♗xg3 (or 19...f4 20.♗xc6 bxc6 21.♕xc6 and a perpetual is likely) 20.♗xc6 bxc6 21.♕xc6 ♗xf2+ 22.♔xf2 ♖h2+ 23.♔f3 ♕xc6+ 24.♖xc6 ♖xd2, and now the accurate 25.♖c5 f4 should end in a draw.

19...♘e7 20.f4 ♘g8! Or 20...gxf4 21.exf4 ♘g8. **21.♕b3 ♘f6 22.fxg5? ♘e4 23.♗e1 ♕h7 24.♕xd5 ♗xg3 25.♕e6 ♘xg5 26.♕c4 ♗xe1 27.♖xe1 ♘e4 28.♕c2 ♖dg8 29.♖ac1? ♕h1** mate, Sharevich-Nemcova, St. Louis 2015.



Variation B

12.♗d2

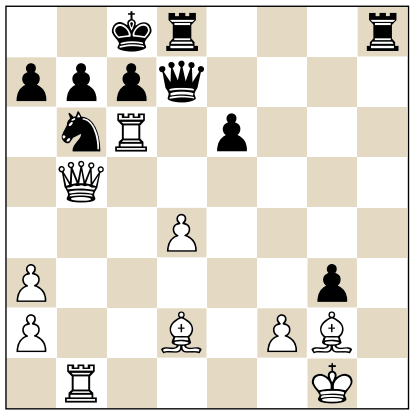
This is the only move that Avrukh indicates, and therefore the line that you will most likely meet in practice.

12...h4 13.♖c1

Avrukh mentions the alternative 13.b4, when after 13...♘cxb4! 14.♗xb4 ♗xb4 15.e4 (15.♗xd5? ♕xd5 16.♕xb4 blunders into 16...hxg3 17.fxg3 ♖xh2!) 15...♘f4! 16.gxf4 ♕xd4 17.♕xd4 ♖xd4 he states that 'I am not sure White has anything here'. A curious line: in all likelihood Black will obtain three pawns for the knight, which is sufficient in an endgame. Note that 13.♘c3 transposes to Variation A.

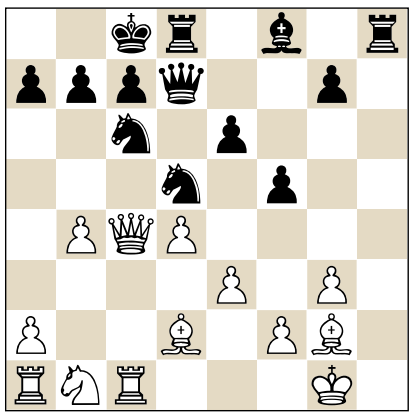
13...hxg3

13...f5 14.♘a3 (14.b4 transposes into the main line) 14...g5 15.♕a4 hxg3 16.hxg3 ♗xa3 17.bxa3 f4 18.exf4 gxf4 19.♖ab1 fxg3 20.♕b5 ♘b6 21.♖xc6 (Rodshtein-Shyam, Benasque 2013)



and now Black should have defended by 21...gxf2+ 22.♔f1 bxc6! 23.♗xc6 ♖h1+!! 24.♗xh1 ♕xb5+ 25.♖xb5 ♖xd4, and the tactics favour Black!

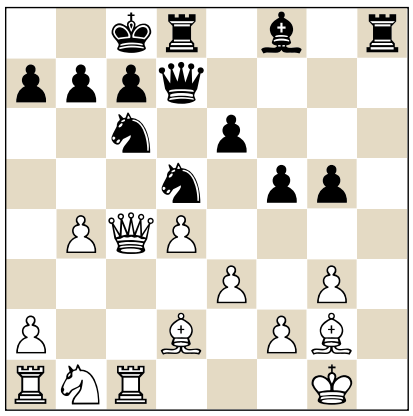
14.hxg3 f5 Black is following the well-known recipe from Variation A. Now the idea of 12.♗d2 becomes clear – without the knight on c3, White can play **15.b4**



This was played in the game Swinkels-Polaczek, Germany 2013, and this is Avrukh's repertoire choice. The Israeli grandmaster now analyses 15...♗xb4, 15...♘cxb4 and 15...♗d6 as in the above-mentioned game. I think I have found a major improvement for Black with:

15...g5!?

This is not amongst the top choices of the engines, but to a human being like me this looks far more logical than taking pawns on the wing where you have hidden your king. And even compared to 15...♗d6 it feels logical not to waste any time but to strike as fast as possible – weren't we all taught that that is what counts in positions with castling on opposite sides? In view of the importance of this line I will now go into more analytical detail than I would normally do in an SOS article.

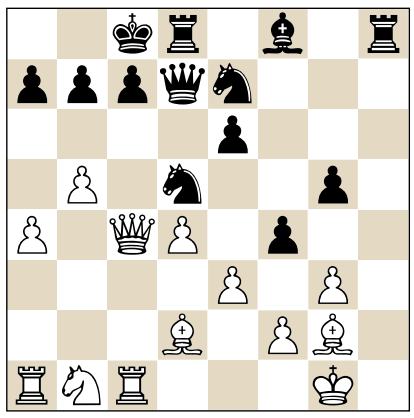


16.b5 16.♘c3 can be met by 16...f4!?.

16...♘ce7 17.a4

The logical plan, and also consistent with Swinkels' play in the above-mentioned game. Instead 17.♘c3 f4 18.♘e4?! fxe3 (18...♘f5) 19.fxe3 (White loses after 19.♘c5 exd2! 20.♘xd7 dxc1♕+ 21.♖xc1 ♖xd7) 19...♘f5 favours Black.

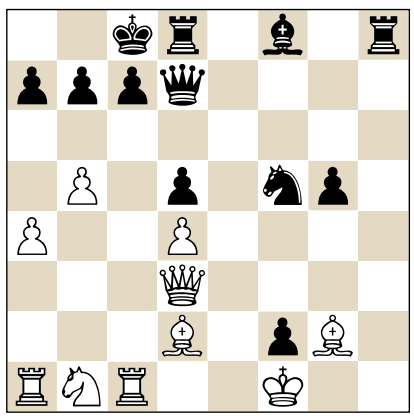
17...f4



The engines still have trouble appreciating the strength of Black's attack. The lines now fork:

Variation B1

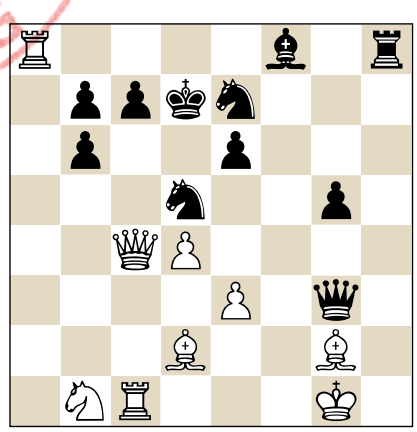
18.e4 fxg3! 19.exd5 19.fxg3 ♘b6 20.♕d3 ♗g7! is better for Black. **19...gxf2+ 20.♔f1** No good is 20.♔xf2 exd5 (20...♗g7) 21.♕c3 ♗g7. **20...exd5 21.♕d3 ♘f5**



and with three pawns for the piece and an attack the position is easier to play for Black.

Variation B2

18.a5 fxg3 19.fxg3 Now after 19...♘f5 White has a neat escape with 20.b6! (20.a6 b6 favours Black; 20.e4? ♘fe3−+) 20...♕h7! 21.♔f2 ♕h2 (21...♗d6 22.bxa7 ♔d7 23.♖h1∞) 22.♕xc7+! ♘xc7 23.♖xc7+ ♔b8 24.♖xb7+ ♔c8 25.♖c7+, with perpetual check. However, very strong is **19...♕d6! 20.b6 ♕xg3 21.a6** 21.bxa7 ♔d7−+. **21...axb6! 22.a7 ♔d7 23.a8♕ ♖xa8 24.♖xa8**



White is a rook up (versus three pawns), but Black is more or less winning after 24...♖h2 25.♕e2 ♘xe3!.

Variation B3

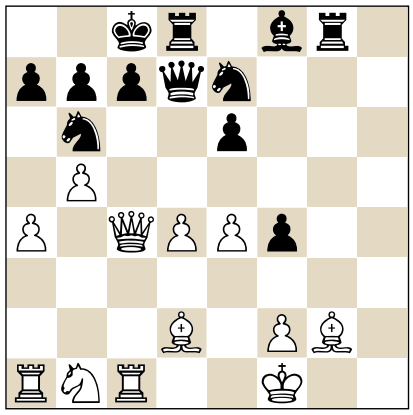
18.gxf4 gxf4 19.e4 ♖g8! 20.♔f1

White is walking a tightrope.

– 20.exd5 f3 21.dxe6 ♖xg2+ 22.♔f1 ♕d6 is pretty sharp, but Black is better after 23.♖a3 ♘d5 24.♖xf3 ♖h2.

– 20.♕e2 ♗g7! 21.exd5 ♗xd4 22.♖a3 (22.d6 ♕xd6 23.♖a3 ♖g6 24.♕f3 ♖dg8 25.♕xb7+ ♔d7∓) 22...♕xd5 23.♕f3 ♗b2, and Black is better once again.

20...♘b6



21.♕d3

White's position is much harder to play than Black's. Some alternatives:

– 21.♕c3 ♗h6 22.♖a2 ♔b8 23.♖ac2 ♘a8.

– 21.♕c2 ♖xg2 22.♔xg2 e5 23.f3 (23.dxe5 ♕g4+ 24.♔h2 ♘c6!−+) 23...♘g6 24.♗e1 ♗e7, with an attack.

21...♕xd4 An alternative is 21...♘g6 22.a5 ♘a8. **22.♕xd4 ♖xd4 23.♗xf4 ♘c4 24.♗xc7 ♔xc7 25.♘a3 ♘g6 26.♖xc4+ ♖xc4 27.♘xc4 ♗c5** And White's extra pawn is meaningless. ■

Wei Yi, way to go!

Spectacular talent Wei Yi was the hero of the Chinese squad that, in the wake of their Olympiad victory in Norway, also claimed the World Team Championship in Armenia. On his return to Beijing the hot young star talked to our Chinese correspondent WGM **Jilin Zhang**.

Is the 16-year-old prodigy China's answer to Magnus Carlsen?

Wei Yi and I meet at a Starbucks quite close to the offices of the Chinese Chess Federation on Tian Tan Dong Road. I know that building, where most of the members of the Chinese teams live, only too well. I used to go there as a junior talent myself, around the time that Wei Yi was born! On my way to Starbucks, I was thinking to myself what a tremendous development chess has seen in China in the past decade!

Wei Yi walks in quietly, wearing a red T-shirt and slacks. With his sport shoes and his height he looks like a basketball player. The only accessories that he carries are his cellphone and his public transport pass – we're three stops away from the national team's home. I'm glad that he's found time, as he is busy. Yesterday he returned from the World Teams in Armenia, this afternoon he is going to his hometown Yancheng for a short vacation before the national championship in Xing Hua in Jiangsu Province. Despite the pressure that he must feel, he is relaxed. And why not? He should be in a good mood, as following the Olympiad in Tromsø, the Chinese team also won the World Team Championship. Who could have foreseen this, that within a year the Chinese men would win the two most important team events in the world?

Wei Yi is happy with this new success, but attempts to remain modest. Playing on Board 4 in Norway was relatively easy compared to Board 4 in Armenia, he says. At the Olympiad he officially was the fifth player, and he only played five games, from which he collected four points. This time he had to play all nine rounds and scored plus-5 without a single loss. He gained 16 Elo points, climbed to 33rd place in the world rankings and took over Richard Rapport's position as the top junior in the world.

'This was quite a good result for me, but actually I am not satisfied with the quality of some of my games,' he says. 'Only my win against Israel was of crucial importance. The top three boards saw that I had an advantage in my game against Rodshtein and they all drew very quickly. In that game I had shown good opening preparation, so he spent a lot of time in the beginning. But in the end we were both under time-pressure and I couldn't figure out a winning plan. So I kept going for two-time repetitions, and when my opponent unjustly claimed a threefold repetition, I got two extra minutes. Then I calculated the position precisely and thought: 'OK, you are done'. My teammates all stayed to follow the game in the playing hall. Their support was very important to me.'

The team was slightly different from the team that won the Olympiad. The World Teams saw a return of Bu Xiangzhi, who in his younger years was a prodigy himself. 'Bu Xiangzhi (29) was the oldest and most experienced player on the team. He helped us to stay focused and motivated the others. Ding Liren was playing on top board for the first time. He said he was kind of nervous, but because he was playing close to the national flag, he felt empowered. Yu Yangyi finished only on +1. He wasn't in good form. But the way he survived a completely lost position against Bruzon in our match against Cuba and even went on to win was a miracle. Wang Chen was the only team member to be selected from a qualification event (ten players, including five GMs, contested one spot on the team. Although still an IM, Wang Chen won – JZ). He doesn't have much experience, but the draw he managed to pull from the fire in a highly dubious position in the match against Egypt was a great contribution, as it helped us win that match.'

In a short period of time, Wei Yi has become a solid fixture on the Chinese team. Isn't he surprised by his meteoric rise? 'I didn't feel any big changes. It's all gone step by step. I had a 2500+ rating back in 2013, but maybe I improved faster in 2014 and 2015.' His rise in rating points has been compared to that of Magnus Carlsen's. Has he been thinking about this comparison?

'Yes, I looked at that. But I think that back then, Carlsen was ranked number 14 in the world. Now, because of the rating inflation, I am only ranked 40 (33 on the May list, 30 on the June list – JZ). So rating doesn't mean that much at this point.' He also knows about the praise Carlsen had for him in an interview during the Tata Steel tournament, but it doesn't get him overly excited. 'I think it's kind of exaggerated. But I am also quite happy to hear Carlsen say that. He is my idol, after all.'

Other than Carlsen, he admires Kasparov. 'His tactics are wonderfully artistic in a natural way. I was surprised to see his recent rapid and blitz match against Short. If only there could have been a match between Kasparov and Carlsen both at their peak; that would have been fantastic. One is very gifted in tactics and attacking, while the other excels in handling strategic positions.'

When I ask him if he has a hero from the past, he smiles and doesn't have to think long. 'Zhu Geliang from the Three Kingdoms period.' Zhu Geliang, who lived from 181 to 234 AD, is seen as one of China's greatest strategists, and a lot has been written by him and about him. 'These books are my favourite literature. In the beginning I mainly enjoyed the interesting stories, but now I am mature enough to see deeper, and appreciate his thoughts and strategies.'

First steps

Born on June 2nd, 1999, Wei Yi first got to know about chess in the second year of the kindergarten he went to in Yancheng. A kind teacher offered to give the kids a couple of free lessons to see if they were interested. 'Once I saw chess, I was immediately attracted by the appearance of the pieces and their functions. Then, during the summer vacation, I had nothing to do at home, and my mother suggested that I go and study chess at the local Hansheng chess school.' In 2006, not long after learning chess, seven-year-old Wei Yi played his first national youth championship, in the U-8 group, where he took 6th place. His parents decided to let him continue studying chess more seriously.

> 'Once I saw chess, I was immediately attracted by the appearance of the pieces and their functions.'

The National Youth Championship was a painful experience for Wei Yi. A lot of boys of his age became champions, but he didn't. In 2007 he finished 4th in the U-8 championship, while in 2008 and 2009 he was the runner-up in the U-10 section. One year later he also had to content himself with second place in the U-12 section and it was only in 2011 that he finally became U-12 champion.

Seven-year-old Wei Yi studying chess (and playing table-tennis and computer games) in Yancheng. 'I missed my parents a lot. But the harvest was rich.'

But there was an even bigger feat in 2010, when he played in the U-12 World Youth Championship for the first time, as one of four Chinese boys (the others were Xu Yi, Bai Jinshi and Wang Yiye). 'I was lucky to win that championship, as with three rounds to go I was one point behind the leader, the American top-seed, Kayden Troff. I managed to win our game and then I also won my next game. But with one round to go I was still tied with him and he had better chances in the tiebreak. Luckily, I won my final game with white while he drew his last game with black.' I am looking at Wei Yi as he remembers the last rounds of that championship and can still sense his happiness about that success.

Encouraged by his title, he immediately went on to play in the Chinese League, where he beat none other than GM Ni Hua. 'That was my only win in that year's league, but it certainly boosted my confidence.'

Wei Yi's performance in the Chinese League, which has been attracting an increasing number of foreign GMs, is a clear reflection of his spectacular rise in the past years. While he scored an 'educational' –6 and –9 in 2010 and 2011, he had +4 performances in 2012 and 2013, and a stupendous +12 (from 22 games) in 2014!

Leaving home

The chess education that Wei Yi got at the Hansheng Chess school in Yancheng concentrated on basic openings and theory. 'We got a lot of mate-in-two and mate-in-three exercises, where the first move was no check', he remembers. The next important step he took in 2006, when he moved to Nantong to live with coach Gu Jun. In his house there were other players of his strength with whom he could play and train. The coach's wife now took care of him. His parents visited him occasionally in the weekends.

The days in Nantong followed a strict routine: going to school in the

morning, and homework and chess training in the afternoon and night. Wei Yi was the only student who was not local, and he felt lonely. 'I missed my parents a lot. But the harvest was rich. I learnt a lot of deep ideas in chess and learnt how to study the Encyclopedia and other chess books.' And there was an old man named Zhang Hua, who always came to play a serious game against him. 'We must have played close to a hundred games that year.'

Wei Yi's mother, with whom I spoke after meeting her son, vividly remembers his time in Nantong: 'Wei Yi is a very obedient boy. At the age of seven we let him choose whether or not to study chess in Nantong. I was only prepared to take him back if he asked for it. But he didn't. He didn't show us his tears and chose to be strong. I myself cried a lot, and now when I think about that time I still cry. His father comforted me by saying: sweet is the pleasure after pain. And indeed, looking back now everything seems to have been worth it.'

Carefree years

After a year of serious chess study in Nantong Wei Yi's parents sent him to Wu Xi for advanced chess studies. The Dong Bei Tang Primary school in Wuxi was one of the chess bases of the Chinese Chess Association, with excellent trainers and students. Here, too, half the day was dedicated to school and half the day to chess. Wei Yi shared a twin room with his trainer Ji Dan, who took care of his daily life and training. Ji Dan was a stable and positive influence on him. Wei Yi felt he was in a secure environment, staying and eating and sleeping in the school. Ji Dang remembers him as a good pupil: 'We didn't need to worry about him much. He always looked after his training and his studies as well, right from his first grade. I kept him company for a few years and witnessed his smooth growth in each of these areas. He is mentally stable, losing games didn't affect him much. He'd just come back and continue training. Overall, he is a very disciplined young man.'

This positive assessment is shared by the supervisor of the school, Pan Gang: 'What impressed me most was that he always had the best results, while at the same time being humble. He always followed instructions. When playing a training match, some of the other students were tempted to be proud when they were a little bit stronger than the others, but he was humble enough to play any opponent that we arranged for him. In general he trained very hard and had very good self-control not to play a lot of computer games. That's why he improved so much in such a short time.'

Funnily enough, Wei Yi has no recollections of him being a model student: 'I was kind of lazy at first. I don't know why, but I just didn't feel like training. Instead I played a lot of computer games. I don't remember when I started working hard. For me the highlights were that many stronger players, e.g. Ding Liren, Lu Shanglei and Lou Yiping, constantly visited our school to play with us. In 2009, the Jiangsu Province Team was looking for a new player for the China League. GM Xu Jun came to our school and asked for a young player with good potential, and they recommended me.'

His general studies didn't cause him many problems, and most of the time he was among the top three of his class, showing especially good results in maths.

For Wei Yi these were carefree years: 'I remember there was a big blizzard, which was quite rare in Wuxi. We had great fun playing in the snow and having snowball fights. We'd play hide and seek, simple games, or play with a Bamboocopter (a toy helicopter made out of bamboo – JZ). At the time things were very simple. I didn't feel bad when losing a game or anything. I had no real target in life. I would quickly get bored talking to my mom on the phone.'

YAO LIPING

A carefree Wei Yi (9) and his mascot at the 2008 Czech Open.

Things changed when he got sick in 2009: 'It's called allergic purpura, and it's kind of serious. My mother even quit her job to take care of me in the hospital. It's all cured now and on my doctor's instructions I have to avoid food that causes this allergy. But I still have seafood every now and then.' Wei Yi says he doesn't like the pimples on his face, which have nothing to do with this allergy. I tell him not to worry. For a teenager and a meat lover (which he told me he is), it's absolutely normal!

Professional at 12

In December 2011, when he was only 12 years old, Wei Yi turned professional. Like all the other professional chess players on the national team he began to play chess full-time. He joined the Provincial team (of Jiangsu Province, the same team that Hou Yifan plays for – JZ), got a regular salary just like any other government officer and started a professional chess career. No more school, but seven hours of chess training each day, combined with physical training like basketball and table tennis.

He goes home three to five times a year. His parents and grandparents miss him a lot. He is a single child, but they have not had much chance to

The Chinese World Champions: Bu Xiangzhi, coach Xu Jun, Ding Liren, Yu Yangyi, coach Li Wenliang, Wei Yi and Wang Chen.

spoil him, like they loved to do before he was six years old.

Even though he was a professional now, he remained remarkably relaxed about losing games. 'Losing isn't that terrible. Only losing because of my own mistakes, such as losing a winning game, can make me feel terrible. But I've learned to control my emotions. In everyday life I am very cautious. I generally don't like taking risks, but in chess I do because it's fun and doesn't leave physical wounds.'

But then, he doesn't lose that many games anymore these days, as the past few years have seen a steady rise in his chess skills. We know his recent history. There have been many ups and very few downs like the 2014 Junior World Championship, where he lost in the penultimate round to Russian top-seed Fedoseev and lost his chance to fight for the title. He had to settle for second place, behind his compatriot Lu Shanglei. That was a big blow for him. But there were very many sweet results. At the 2013 Reykjavik Open, at only 13 years of age, he made his final grandmaster norm by finishing in 6th place, one of his victims being Maxime Vachier-Lagrave. At the World Cup in Tromsø later that year, he knocked out Ian Nepomniachtchi and Alexey Shirov before he himself was eliminated by Shakhriyar Mamedyarov.

Last year he was a member of the Chinese team that won the Olympiad, and this year he started by winning the Tata Steel Challengers in Wijk aan Zee, which guarantees him a spot in the top group next year. On the March 2015 rating list he became the youngest player ever to cross the 2700 mark (with a 2706 rating), a record previously held by Magnus Carlsen. And now he has also won the World Teams with the Chinese national team. What more is in store for him? A lot, if we are to believe the head coach of the Chinese team, Ye Jiangchuan: 'Wei Yi definitely has great potential. He loves chess, is physically fit and always stays calm. He is a good player overall. He is firm and tenacious, good at defence and knows how to fight back. Surely he will achieve bigger successes in the future.' (Indeed, Wei Yi also sparkled at the Chinese championship that ended as we go to press. In Xinghua he scored 7½/11 to become the youngest national champion in the history of China chess – ed.)

At the Starbucks, where we chatted for close to two hours, Wei Yi didn't drink coffee, but instead he ordered cold strawberry milk tea. I felt bad that he hadn't had any breakfast before our meeting and offered him a sandwich or whatever he fancied around noon time. But he insisted on going back and grabbing some Lanzhou stretched noodles near the headquarters of the national team. A lovely, very modest, six foot one tall 16-year-old boy who likes to stay indoors, enjoys history books, costume dramas and even kids' cartoons. People must find it hard to see him as a super chess master, as the rising star from China. But that's what he is!

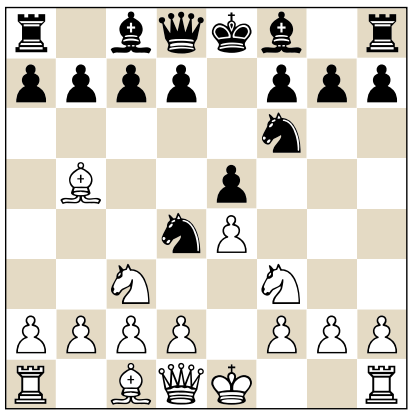
Tsakhkadzor 2015

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
1	China	*	2	3½	2	2½	2	2½	3	3	2½	15
2	Ukraine	2	*	1½	2½	1½	2	2½	2½	2½	4	12
3	Armenia	½	2½	*	2½	2½	2	1½	1½	2½	2½	11
4	Russia	2	1½	1½	*	2	3½	2½	1½	2½	3½	10
5	USA	1½	2½	1½	2	*	1½	2½	3	2	3	10
6	Hungary	2	2	2	½	2½	*	2	2	1½	2½	9
7	Israel	1½	1½	2½	1½	1½	2	*	2½	3½	2	8
8	Cuba	1	1½	2½	2½	1	2	1½	*	1½	3	7
9	India	1	1½	1½	1½	2	2½	½	2½	*	3	7
10	Egypt	1½	0	1½	½	1	1½	2	1	1	*	1

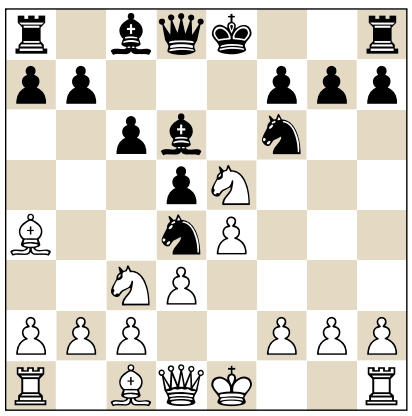
NOTES BY
Wei Yi

KP 11.5 – C48
Wei Yi
Maxim Rodshtein
Tsakhkadzor 2015 (6)

It's my pleasure to show you two of my games played in the World Team Championship in Tsakhkadzor. Even though there are some mistakes in them, they are quite interesting.
This first game was played in Round 6. In the previous rounds my opponent had scored 4/4, so I was on my guard.
1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♘d4

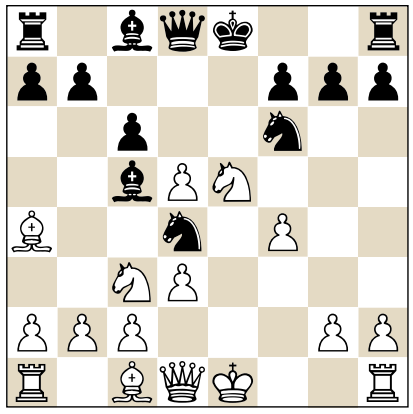


5.♗a4 In this position I had played 5.♗c4 and 5.♘xd4 before. This move is a new attempt.
5...c6 5...♗c5 is also a popular line.
6.♘xe5 d5 6...d6 7.♘f3 ♗g4 8.d3 would have been another story.
7.d3 ♗d6

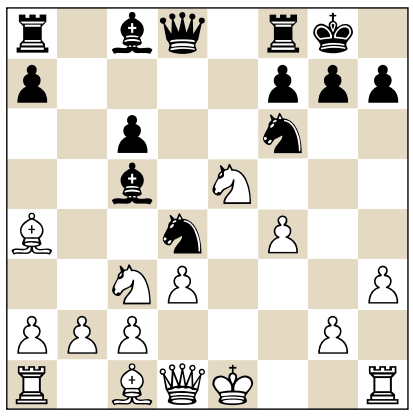


8.f4 After 8.♘f3 ♘xf3+ 9.gxf3 0-0 Black has enough compensation for the pawn because of White's poor piece setup.

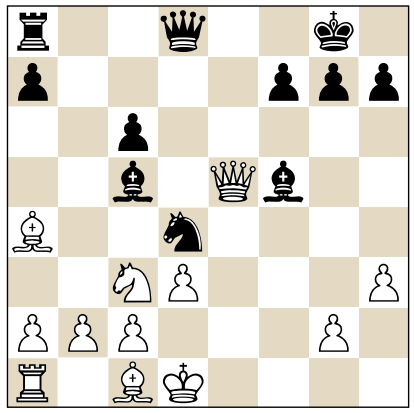
8...♗c5 9.exd5



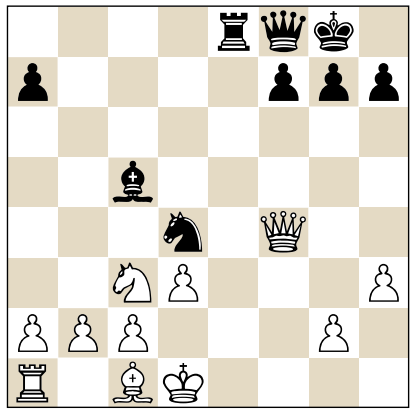
9...0-0
Black sacrifices another pawn. 9...♘xd5!? was another continuation to be considered.
10.dxc6 bxc6 11.h3!?



An interesting idea, meant to guard the g4-square and preparing ♕d2 and ♔d1 in order to solve the problem that White cannot castle. The king is relatively safe on d1, but it also slows down the development of the white pieces.
11...♖e8 12.♕d2
After 12.♗e3?! ♘xc2+ 13.♕xc2 ♗xe3 14.♗xc6 ♗xf4 15.♗xe8 ♗g3+ Black has a good position.
12...♘d7 13.♔d1 ♘xe5 14.fxe5 ♖xe5 15.♖e1 ♖xe1+ 16.♕xe1 ♗f5 17.♕e5



17...♕f8?
This is a mistake. Black should have played 17...♗b6!, and after White's capture on c6 a draw would be the most likely result: 18.♗xc6 ♗c7! 19.♕c5 (19.♕d5? loses to 19...♕f6, followed by ...♗g4+!) 19...♗b6 20.♕d5 ♕f6 21.♗xa8 ♗g4+! 22.hxg4 ♕f1+ 23.♔d2 ♕f2+ 24.♔d1, with a perpetual.
Now I can safely take the c6-pawn.
18.♗xc6! ♘xc6 19.♕xf5 ♘d4 20.♕f4 ♖e8

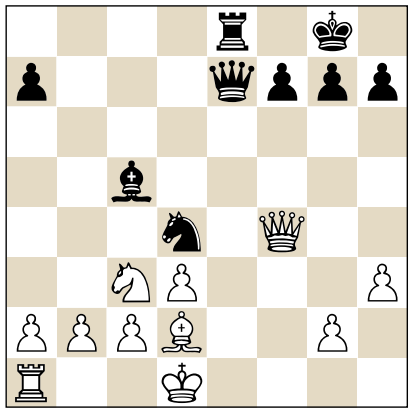


21.♗d2?
This is a mistake. I had missed 21.♘e4!, which is a good move, as after 21...f5 22.♘xc5 ♕xc5 23.c3 ♕c6, White has 24.♕f2! ♕a4+ 25.b3 ♘xb3 26.♕c2!, and this should be winning.

Tsakhkadzor 2015
Individual results Team China

					1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	PTS	#	%	TPR
1	**Ding Liren**	IGM	CHN	2751	1	½	½	½	1	½	½	½	½	5½	9	61%	2798
2	**Yu Yangyi**	IGM	CHN	2724	½	½	½	1	0	½	0	1	1	5	9	56%	2687
3	**Bu Xiangzhi**	IGM	CHN	2681	½	½	½	1	-	½	1	½	½	5	8	63%	2774
4	**Wei Yi**	IGM	CHN	2703	½	½	½	1	1	1	½	1	1	7	9	78%	2842
5	**Wang Chen**	IM	CHN	2531	-	-	-	-	½	-	-	-	-	½	1	50%	2389

21...♕e7 After this move I cannot solve the problem of my lag in development.



22.♕g5

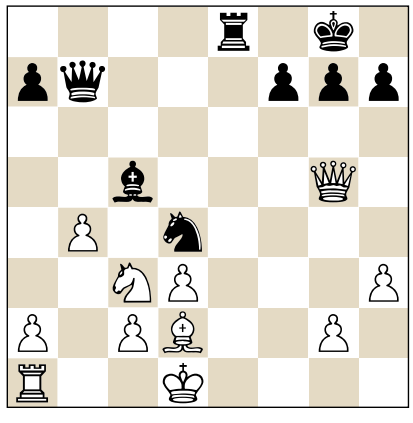
It depends on how you look at it whether this move deserves a !? or a ?!. My opponent had limited time on his clock, so I decided to further complicate the position.

Objectively speaking, 22.b4 ♗b6 23.♖b1 would have been better. One possible continuation would be 23...♕b7! 24.♕f1 ♕c6 25.♖b2, with a slight advantage for White (after 25.a4 Black plays 25...h6!, a quiet move in a tense situation!).

22...♕b7

Or 22...♕c7 23.♘d5 ♕c6 24.♘e3! ♕b6 (24...♖xe3 25.♕xe3 ♘xc2 is not good for Black: 26.♕e4 ♕xe4 27.dxe4 ♘xa1 28.♔c1) 25.b4! ♗e7 26.♕e5 ♘c6 27.♕e4 ♘xb4 28.♗c3, and White has a slight advantage.

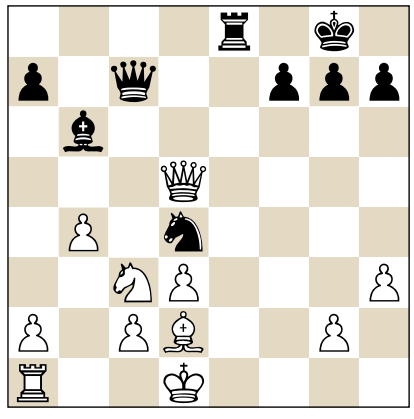
23.b4!?



23...♗b6

Stronger was 23...♗xb4! 24.♖b1 ♕b6! (24...a5 is met by 25.♕d5! – and not 25.a3?? ♘f3!, and White can resign) 25.♗e3 ♕d6 26.♘d5 ♗c5, and Black has good prospects to hold.

24.♕d5 ♕c7



25.♔c1?! Hoping to get the king to a safer place, but 25.a4 ♖d8 26.♕e4 f5 27.♕f4 would have been better.

25...♖d8 Missing an interesting and strong idea: 25...♖c8! 26.♔b2 ♘e2! 27.♕c4 ♕b8 28.♕g4 ♗d4 29.♕xe2 ♕xb4+ 30.♔c1 ♗xc3 31.♗xc3 ♕xc3 32.♖b1 h6! (another quiet move), after which Black would have good drawing chances.

26.♕c4

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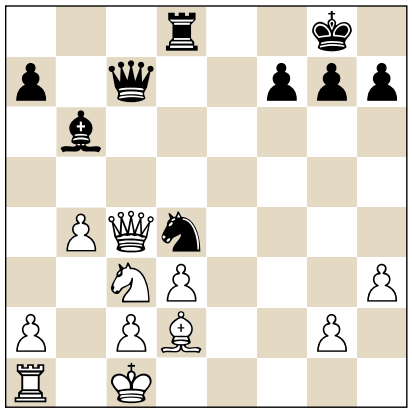
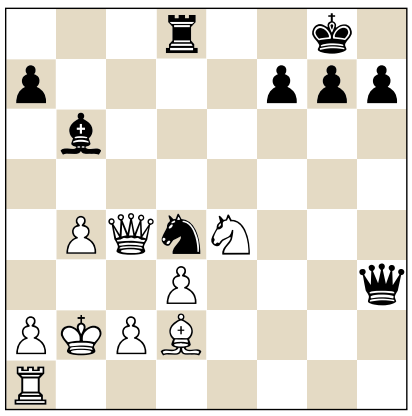
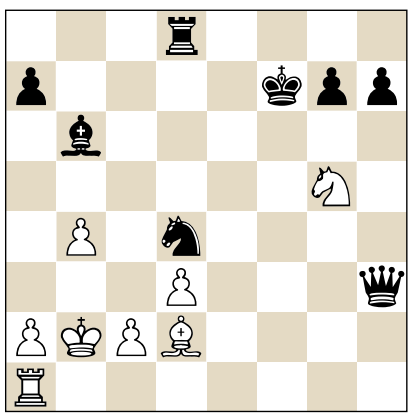


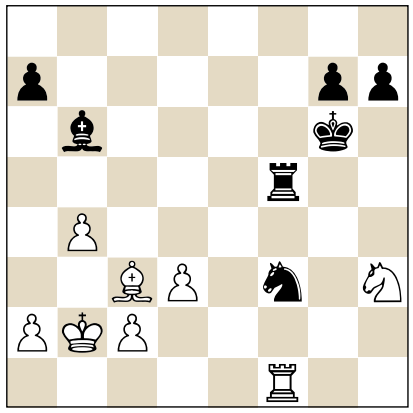
26...♕g3 26...♕b7 27.♔b2 ♖c8? (27...♕xg2 transposes to the actual game) 28.♖e1! h6 29.♖e7! was what I had been hoping for during the game.
27.♔b2 After 27.a4 ♕xg2 28.a5 ♘f3 29.axb6 ♕xd2+ 30.♔b2 axb6 31.♕c7 (I had seen 31.♕d5 ♖c8 32.♕c6 ♕xc2+!) 31...♖f8 32.♘d5 h6 33.♕d6 ♖e8 34.♕d7 ♖f8 35.♖a3 White has the initiative.
27...♕xg2 28.♘e4 ♕xh3



29.♕xf7+
I decided to go for an endgame, as after 29.♖g1 ♖c8 30.♘f6+ ♔f8 31.♘xh7+ (31.♗f4 ♖c6!!) 31...♔g8 32.♘f6+ ♔f8 33.♗f4 ♖c6! 34.♕d5 ♖xf6 35.♕a8+ ♔e7 36.♗g5 ♕f5 White has nothing better than to go for perpetual check.
29...♔xf7 30.♘g5+

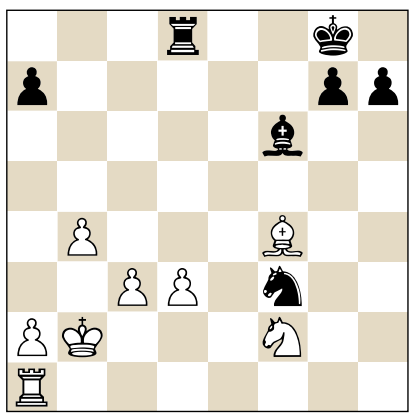


30...♔g8?! After 30...♔g6! 31.♘xh3 ♘f3 32.♗c3 ♖f8 33.♖f1 ♖f5

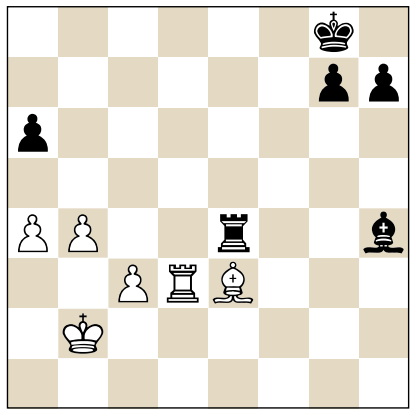


ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

Black's initiative on the kingside is no worse than White's advantage on the queenside. **31.♘xh3 ♘f3 32.♗f4 ♗d4+ 33.c3 ♗f6 34.♘f2**



34...♗h4
A better choice would have been 34...g5! 35.♗e3 ♖d7 (35...h5? 36.♖h1! h4 37.♗xa7) 36.♖h1 ♔g7!, and Black has enough counterplay.
35.♗e3 ♖e8 36.♘e4 ♘e1 37.♖d1 a6 38.a4 ♘xd3+ 39.♖xd3 ♖xe4



This is a very interesting endgame. My pawns look faster than my opponent's. But during the game I couldn't figure out how to use my faster pawn advantage.
40.b5 The right move was 40.♔b3! h5 41.c4 ♗g3 42.b5 axb5 43.cxb5 h4 44.♗c5!, and my pawns would be unstoppable.
40...axb5 41.axb5 h5

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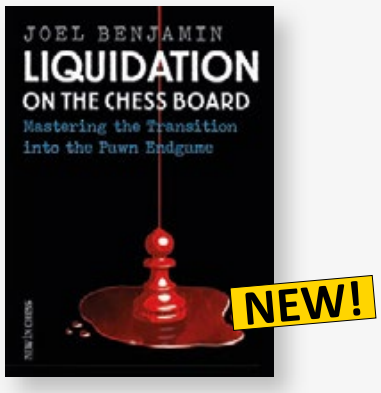

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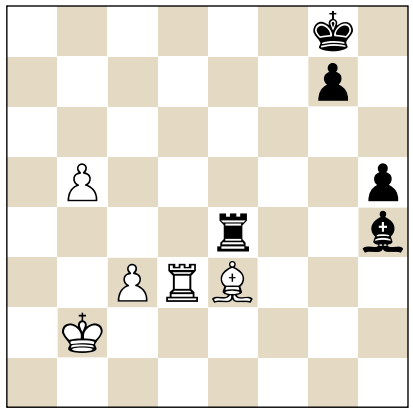
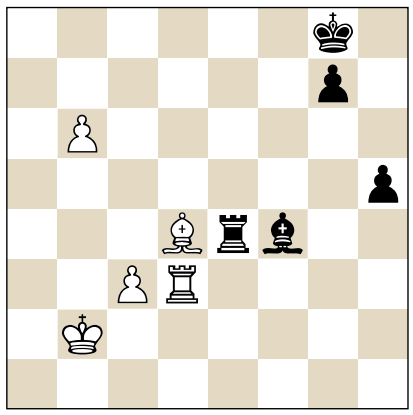


42.♗d4 And here I missed 42.b6! ♗g3 43.♗d2 ♗h2 (43...h4 44.c4! is the key point) 44.♖h3, and White is winning.

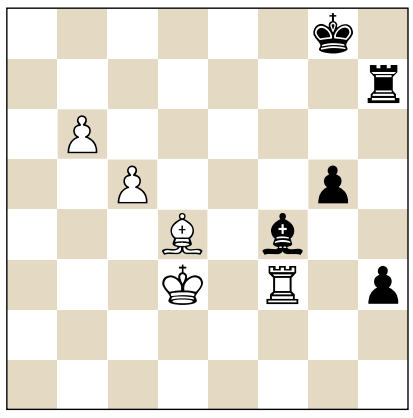
42...♗g5 43.b6 ♗f4

Better was 43...h4 44.♖f3 ♗d8 45.b7 ♗c7 46.♗a7 g5 47.♖f5 g4 48.♖c5 ♗d6, and Black should draw.



44.♖f3?? My fourth chance... I had failed to calculate 44.c4! h4 45.c5 h3 46.c6 h2 47.c7 ♖e8 (47...h1♕ leads to the following splendid variation: 48.c8♕+ ♔f7 49.♕f5+ ♔g8 50.♕d5+ ♔h8 51.♕a8+ ♔h7 52.♖h3+, and wins) 48.♖d1, and White wins.

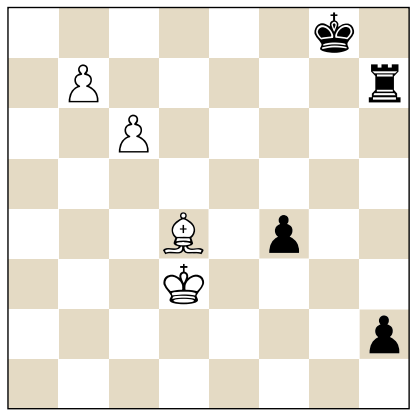
44...g5! 45.♔c2 h4 46.♔d3 ♖e7 47.c4 ♖h7 48.c5 h3



49.♖xf4 gxf4 50.c6

During the game I calculated 50.♗g1 f3 51.♔e3 f2 52.♔xf2 h2 53.♗xh2 ♖xh2+ 54.♔e3 ♖b2, with a draw, so 50.c6 is going to be my last chance...

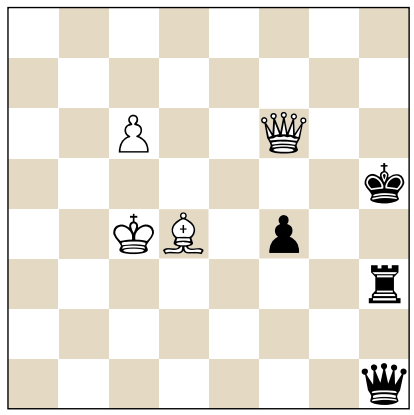
50...h2 51.b7



51...♖h3+?? This move looks like gaining a tempo, but actually it spoils Black's endeavours so far...

After 51...♖xb7 52.cxb7 h1♕ 53.b8♕+ ♔f7 54.♕c7+ ♔e6 55.♕c8+ ♔e7 56.♗c5+ ♔f6 White can't checkmate Black, so it should be a draw. And 51...h1♕ 52.b8♕+ ♔f7 53.♕xf4+ ♔e8 54.♕b8+ ♔f7 55.♕c7+ ♔g6 is also a draw.

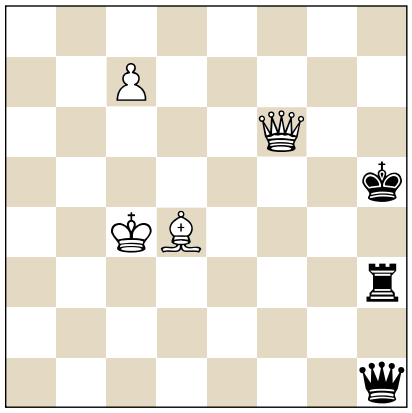
52.♔c4 h1♕ 53.b8♕+ ♔h7 54.♕h8+ ♔g6 55.♕f6+ ♔h5 56.♕f5+ ♔h6 57.♕f6+ ♔h5



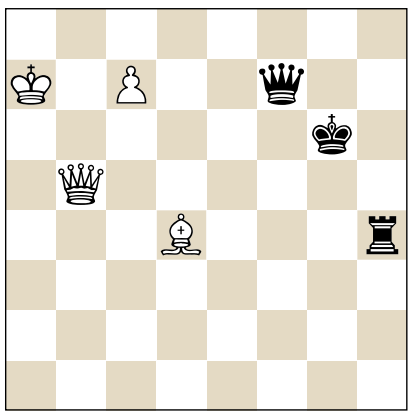
58.♕f5+ Another way to win was 58.c7, for example 58...♕c1+ 59.♗c3 ♕f1+ 60.♔c5 ♕g1+ 61.♔b5 ♕b1+ 62.♗b4 ♕d3+ 63.♔a5 ♕d5+ 64.♔b6, and wins.

58...♔h6 59.♕xf4+ ♔g6 60.♕f6+ ♔h5 61.♕f5+ ♔h6 62.♕f4+ ♔g6 63.♕g4+ ♔h6 64.♕e6+ ♔h5 65.♕f5+ ♔h6 66.♕f6+ ♔h5 67.c7!

The decisive move. At least I didn't miss my fifth winning chance and it's the last one ☺



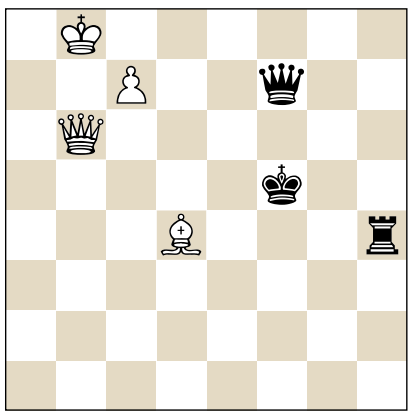
67...♕c1+ 68.♗c3 ♖h4+ 69.♔d5 ♕d1+ 70.♔c5 ♕g1+ 71.♔b5 ♕b1+ 72.♔c5 ♕g1+ 73.♗d4 ♕c1+ 74.♔b6! ♕b1+ 75.♔a7 ♕a2+ 76.♕a6! ♕f7 77.♕b5+ ♔g6



78.♕b6+ Or 78.♔b8 ♕f4 79.♕e8+ (79.♗e5?? ♕b4!) 79...♔h7 80.♕h8+ ♔g6 81.♕g8+ ♔h5 82.♕e8+ ♔g4, and now the simplest is 83.♕e5, and White wins.

78...♔f5 On 78...♔h7 White plays 79.♕b7. And after 78...♔h5 79.♔b8 ♕f4 I just need to go 80.♕b5+ to return to the winning moves in the previous comment.

79.♔b8



Black resigned.

An excellent game! Despite the many mistakes...

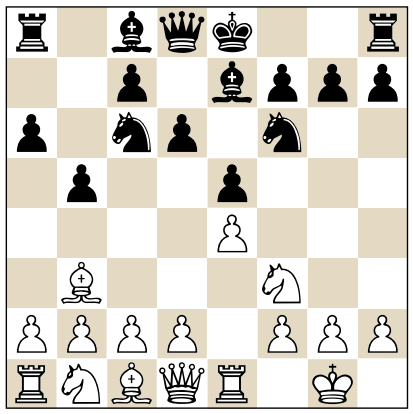
NOTES BY

Wei Yi

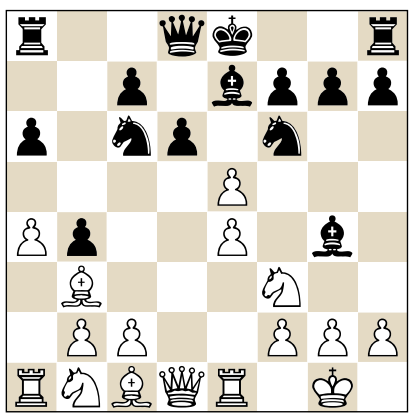
RL 19.3 – C90
Wei Yi
Yuri Gonzalez
Tsakhkadzor 2015 (8)

This game was played in Round 8, a crucial round. Our match against Cuba was full of twists and turns, and our 3-1 victory was an important step towards our victory in the championship.

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♘f6 5.0-0 ♗e7 6.♖e1 b5 7.♗b3 d6



8.a4!? This move came as a surprise to my opponent. It's not a common line. **8...b4 9.d4 ♗g4** 9...0-0 is played more often here. **10.dxe5**



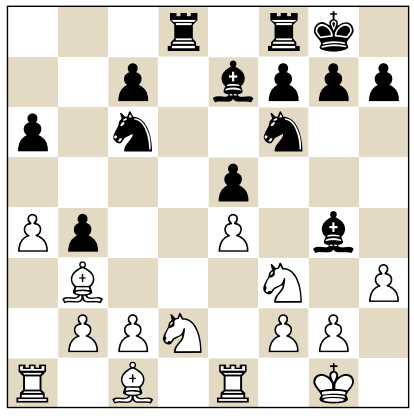
10...dxe5

The alternative is 10...♘xe5.

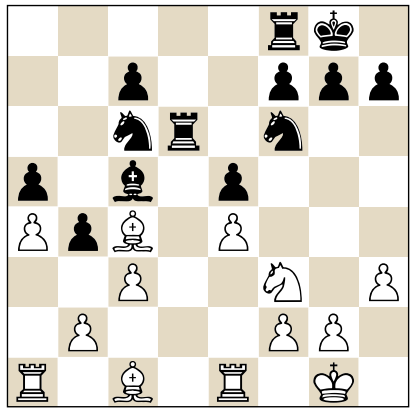
11.♕xd8+

11.♗d5!? looks good but yields nothing: 11...♘xd5 12.exd5 ♗xf3 13.♕xf3 ♘d4 14.♕e4 0-0 15.♗e3 ♗c5 16.♗xd4 ♗xd4 17.c3 bxc3 18.bxc3 ♗c5 19.♕xe5 ♖e8 20.♕xe8+ ♕xe8 21.♖xe8+ ♖xe8 22.♔f1, with equality. 11.♘bd2 is also a good choice. In the game I decided to exchange the queens, because Black's pawn weaknesses would give me a permanent advantage in the endgame.

11...♖xd8 12.♘bd2 0-0 13.h3

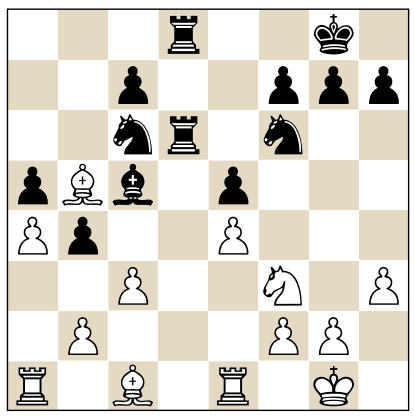


13...♗xf3?! Maybe not the best choice, but after 13...♗e6 14.♗xe6 fxe6 15.♘b3 White also keeps some advantage. **14.♘xf3 ♗c5 15.♗c4 a5 16.c3 ♖d6**



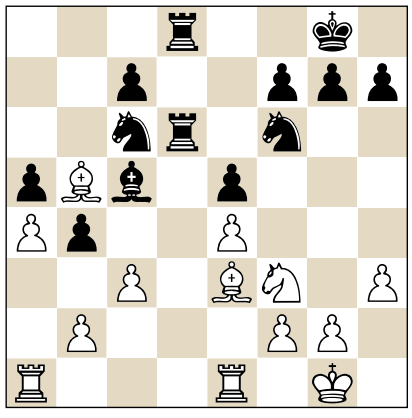
17.♗b5 After 17.♗d2 ♖fd8 18.cxb4 ♖xd2! 19.♘xd2 ♗xb4 20.♘f3 ♗xe1 21.♖xe1 White is better.

17...♖fd8

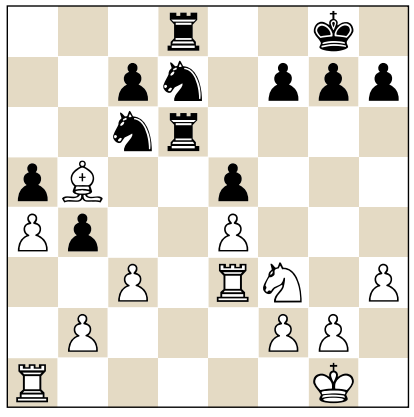


18.♗e3!? Going for the pawn yields little: 18.♗xc6?! ♖xc6 19.♘xe5 ♖e6

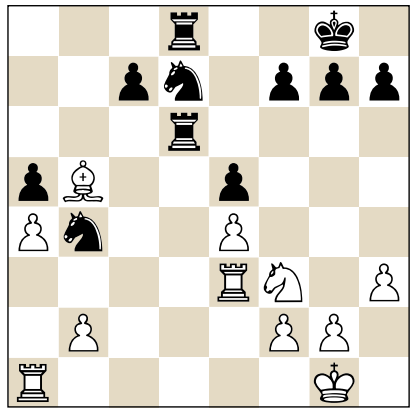
20.♗f4 bxc3 21.bxc3 h6, and Black will soon get the pawn back.
18.♗g5 looks good, but after 18...h6 it's difficult to pick a plan.



18...♗xe3
No better was 18...♘xe4 in view of 19.♘g5! (after 19.♗xc5 ♘xc5 20.♘xe5 ♘xe5 21.♖xe5 bxc3! 22.bxc3 ♘e6 23.♖ae1 ♖d1 24.♔f1 ♖8d5! Black should hold) 19...♘xg5 20.♗xc5 ♖g6 21.♖ed1!, and my bishop pair should give me excellent chances.
19.♖xe3 ♘d7



20.cxb4??
This is an unbelievable move. I had completely missed my opponent's simple answer. What a bad move!
Let's take a look at the alternatives. To begin with, there is 20.♗xc6, when after 20...♖xc6 21.cxb4 axb4 22.♖d3 ♖d6 23.♖xd6 cxd6 24.♖d1 ♘c5 25.♘xe5 ♘xa4 26.♘c6 ♖e8 27.♖xd6 g6 28.♖d4 ♘xb2 29.♘xb4 White is a pawn up, but I would have some difficulties to win.
Interesting is 20.♖c1!?, but after 20...b3! 21.♗xc6 ♖xc6 22.♖d3 ♖d6 23.♖xd6 cxd6 24.♖d1 ♘c5 25.♘xe5 ♔f8 26.♘c4 ♘xe4 27.♘xa5 ♘c5 28.♘c6 ♖c8 29.♘a7! ♖a8 30.♘b5 ♘xa4 31.♖a1 ♖b8 32.♖xa4 ♖xb5 33.♔f1 White will win Black's pawn on b3, but even so it will be difficult for White to win, I think.
The best move was 20.b3!. White stops Black from playing ...b3 and prepares to go ♖c1. This would have offered White good chances.
20...♘xb4!



I had missed this recapture with the simple threat of ...♘c2. Now White has lost all his advantage. Black's pieces are

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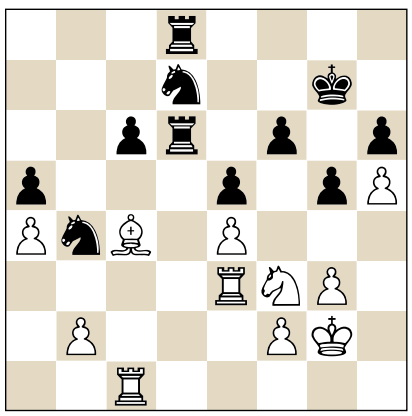
activated and the c-pawn is no longer a weakness. Even worse, I cannot attack his a-pawn and my queenside pawns have become targets...

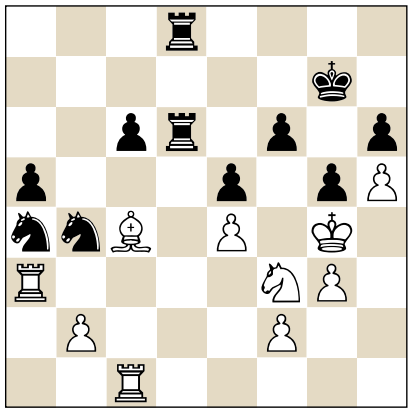
21.♖c1 c6 22.♗c4 h6! 23.g3 g6 24.♔g2 ♔g7 25.h4 f6 26.h5 g5 27.♗e2 ♘f8 28.♗c4 ♘d7



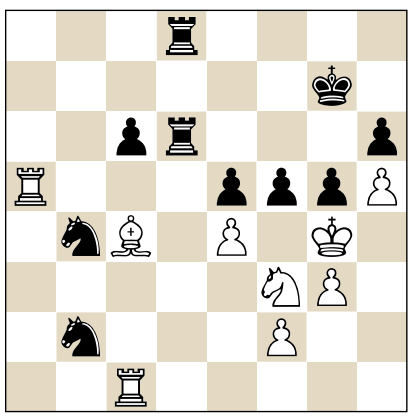
29.♔h3

The reader may choose between ? and !?. This is the start of a crazy plan...

29...♘c5 30.♔g4 ♘xa4 31.♖a3



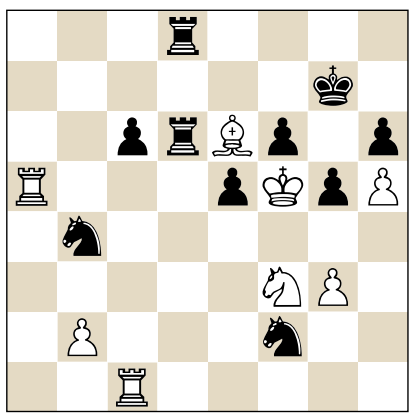
31...♘c5 More precise was 31...♘xb2, when after 32.♖xa5 f5+!



ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

33.♔xf5 ♖f6+ 34.♔g4 ♘xc4 35.♖xc4 ♘d3 36.♖a7+ ♔g8 37.♖a2 ♖df8 38.♘g1 ♘xf2+ 39.♖xf2 ♖xf2 40.♖xc6 ♖f1 41.♘e2 ♖8f3 Black wins.

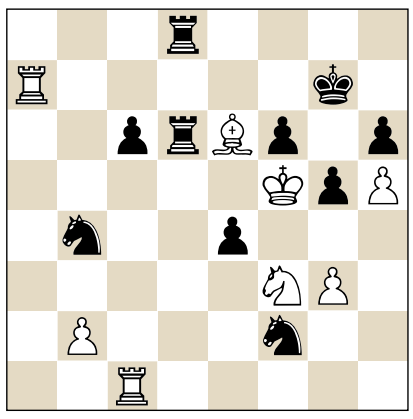
32.♖xa5 ♘xe4 33.♔f5! ♘xf2 34.♗e6 Now it's Zero Hour!



34...e4? This is a mistake. Maybe Black had missed White's 36th move. With the text-move, Black passes up his chance to win. After 34...♔h8 35.♖a7 ♘d5! 36.♖ca1 ♘e4! the two black knights ward off White's attack. Black would be two pawns up and have a clearly winning position.

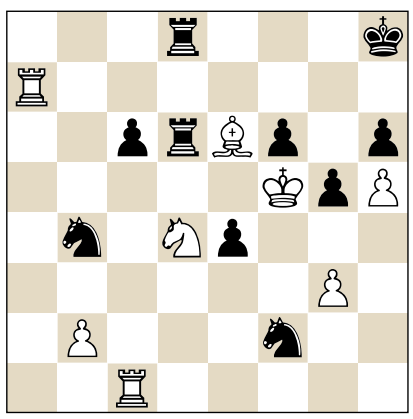
The immediate 34...♘d5 was also good.

35.♖a7+



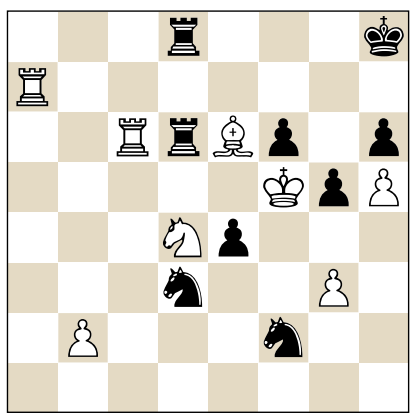
35...♔h8 The king is safer on f8: 35...♔f8! 36.♖ca1 (36.♖f7+ ♔g8!) 36...exf3 37.♖f7+ ♔g8 38.♖aa7 ♖xe6 39.♔xe6 ♘d5 40.♔f5 ♘d3, when perpetual check is White's only option.

36.♘d4!



36...♘bd3?? After this move Black's king has nowhere to run except to squares where it will be checkmated. Instead, after 36...♘fd3 37.♔g6 (Black is also fine after 37.♖c4 ♖b8! or 37.♖ca1 ♘c5) 37...♘e5+ 38.♔xh6 ♘g4+! 39.♗xg4 f5+ 40.♔xg5 ♖g8+ 41.♔xf5 ♖xd4 42.♗e2 e3, Black would still have a good position.

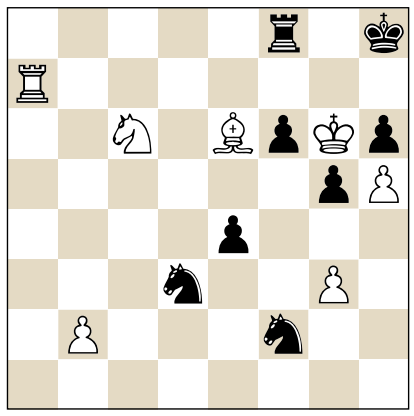
37.♖xc6



37...♖xc6

Also insufficient was 37...♖xd4 38.♖cc7 ♖4d5+ 39.♗xd5 ♖xd5+ 40.♔e6 ♖d8 41.♖h7+ ♔g8 42.♖ag7+ ♔f8 43.♖f7+ ♔g8 44.♖hg7+ ♔h8 45.♔e7 ♖d7+ 46.♔xd7 ♘e5+ 47.♔e6 ♘xf7 48.♔xf7, and White wins.

38.♘xc6 ♖f8 39.♔g6!



Black resigned.

By a funny coincidence I had discussed the classic Short-Timman game with my teammates and our coach during lunch earlier that day. In that game Short's king went g1-h2-g3-f4-g5 and forced his opponent to resign. My king made the same journey g2-h3-g4-f5-g6 and checkmated Black's king. ■

CCSC SAINT LOUIS

The only semi-centenarian in the top-100 and the strongest retiree provided great entertainment.

Attack, always!

The Battle of the Legends between Garry Kasparov (52) and Nigel Short (49) ended in a smashing 8½-1½ victory for the 13th World Champion. Kasparov's dynamic and youthful play made us wax nostalgic and we are delighted that the winner accepted our invitation to write his impressions (and analyse two games!) of this historic exhibition match.

Garry Kasparov

Thanks to the generous patronage of Rex Sinquefield and his remarkable Chess Club and Scholastic Center of Saint Louis, I had the chance to renew a very old rivalry with my friend Nigel Short. We first met in 1977 at the U-16 in France, although we didn't meet at the board there. That would have to wait until the World Junior Championship in 1980 (a draw). And of course Nigel challenged me in a World Championship match in London in 1993 after dispatching Speelman, Gelfand, Karpov and Timman in the Candidates'. So perhaps we should call this encounter our personal senior championship, considering that Nigel is the oldest player in the top 100, a praiseworthy title he would have to cede to me were my name still on the rating list!

The last time I played Nigel wasn't as long ago as many seemed to think. In October 2011 we played an eight-game blitz match in Leuven, Belgium, to promote the 'Your Next Move' charity program and the Kasparov Chess Foundation Europe, based in Brussels. That match was much closer, requiring me to win with black in the final game to take the match by the minimum score. Comparing that result to the lopsided one in St. Louis gives weight both to my having had more time to practise online this time around and to Nigel's jet-lag after he flew in directly from winning an Open in Thailand. My own itinerary was also hectic, but at least I wasn't changing as many time zones – and I haven't been as deeply embroiled in Russian politics as I was around the time of the Leuven match.

The only other comparison is my 2009 rapid and blitz match against Karpov in Valencia, Spain. Then I had been out of professional chess for only four years and I was also in the middle of my training sessions with Magnus, so I was getting just about the best blitz preparation imaginable!

This time around, there was no special training and I was nervous on the first day despite respectable results online. I had no real experience with rapid time-controls, so how my rhythm would adjust was a mystery. Nigel seemed quite optimistic about his chances, perhaps thinking this was a chance to get a measure of revenge for past results and served quite cold. I wasn't planning to go to extremes, avoiding main lines to hide my rust, but Nigel mostly solved this issue for both of us by playing an assortment of junk openings. In Leuven I had met his usual 1.e4 with ...e5 and decided a change to ...c5 was due this time. It was clear from practice that my game was much stronger in attack, and that long strategic and manoeuvring games weren't for me with either colour. I decided to attack always, and for the most part that is how it turned out, with good results.

> 'It was clear from practice that my game was much stronger in attack, and that long strategic and manoeuvring games weren't for me with either colour.'

Even among active 'senior citizen' players, consistency is the biggest issue. To borrow a Biblical phrase, 'the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak', although the problem for veteran chess players is one of focus and stamina, not temptation! Lev Psakhis once said that this is an argument for older players to prefer blitz and rapid over classical chess, a counterintuitive position that is nevertheless accurate. Maintaining concentration for five or six hours at the board is tougher at 50 or 60 than generating the bursts of energy needed in blitz. Before the Leuven match you do have to go back quite far to find my last games against Nigel – all the way back to the final match of the Reykjavik rapid in 2004. That one may also be difficult for commentators to remember, since it was also the site of a more famous pairing, my first-round match against the 14-year-old Magnus Carlsen!

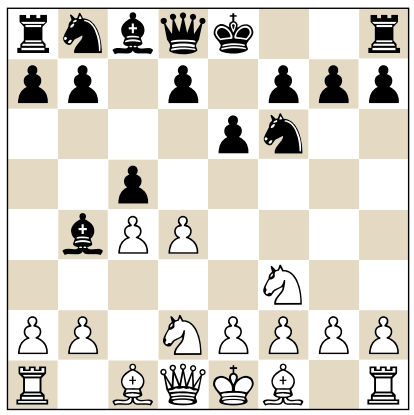
My answer to questions about my future chess plans is still the same as it was the day I retired in 2005: no plans at all. I imagine there will be other opportunities for exhibitions like this one, and chess will always be an important part of my life. But I am a busy man in many other areas these days, from human rights projects to writing books to speaking engagements around the world. And, thanks to my family, and with no disrespect to my former colleagues, I am also a happy man!

I have annotated two games, the rapid game played on Day 1 and the second blitz game on Day 2.

NOTES BY
Garry Kasparov

QI 1.9 – E11
Garry Kasparov
Nigel Short
St. Louis 2015 (1st rapid game)

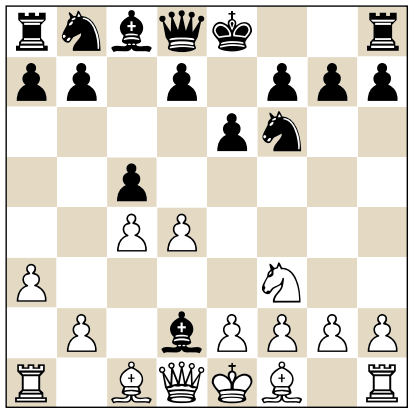
1.d4 e6 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.c4 ♗b4+ 4.♘bd2 c5



5.a3

The most principled decision. In Brussels 1987, I played the mild 5.e3 against Timman in the tournament and drew in 25 moves. Later, when I met Timman in the blitz playoff, I played 5.a3 and won. Don't alter a winning formula, even if it's 28 years later!

5...♗xd2+

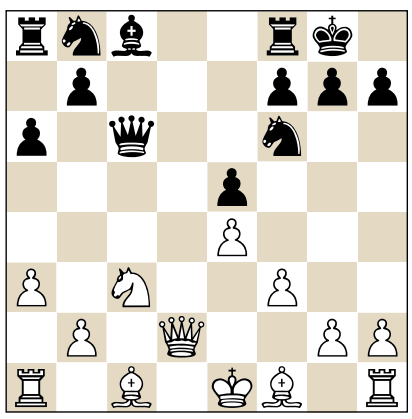


6.♕xd2

Well, time for a new motto: a winning formula from when you were World Champion 27 years ago may not work when you are a retiree! I wasn't really concerned about theory, since I didn't know it, and just wanted to keep more pieces on the board.

The blitz game against Timman went 6.♗xd2 cxd4 7.♘xd4 ♘c6 8.♗c3 0-0 9.♖c1 ♘e4 10.e3 ♕b6 11.♗d3 ♘xc3 12.♖xc3 ♘xd4 13.exd4 d6 14.0-0 h6 15.b4 e5 16.c5 dxc5 17.dxc5 ♕c7 18.♕e2 ♗e6 19.♖e1 f6 20.♕e4, and White won after 64 moves.

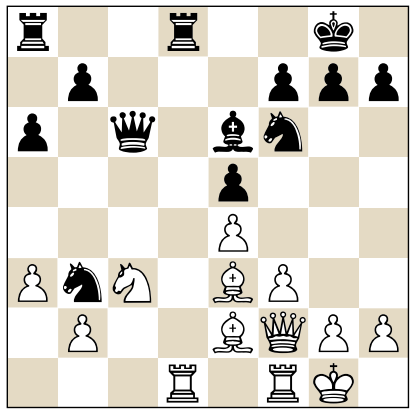
6...cxd4 7.♘xd4 0-0 8.e3 d5 9.cxd5 ♕xd5 10.♘b5 ♕c6 11.f3 a6 12.♘c3 e5 13.e4



13...♘bd7?!

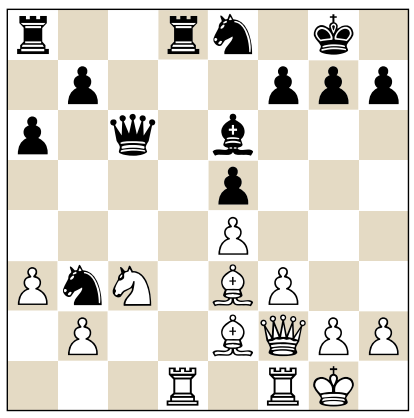
This may be ?, since the wrong piece goes to b3. Perhaps 6.♗xd2 from 1987 is better after all. Compare this to the game Gelfand-Andreikin, Moscow 2013, where Black played very well: 13...♗e6 14.♕f2 ♗b3 15.♗e2 ♕e6 16.0-0 ♘c6 17.♗e3 ♖fd8 18.♗d1 h6 19.♖c1 ♖d3 20.♗e2 ♖d7 21.♗d1 ♖d3 22.♗e2 ♖d7 23.♗d1 draw.

14.♕f2 ♘c5 15.♗e3 ♘b3 16.♖d1 ♗e6 17.♗e2 ♖fd8 18.0-0



18...♘e8?!

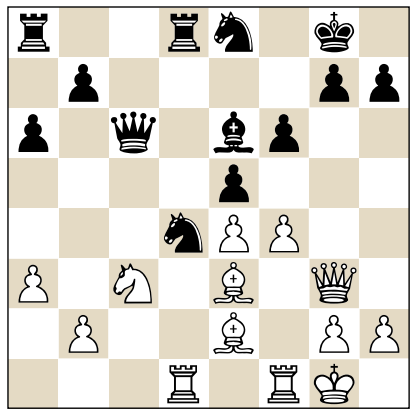
This manoeuvre gives White time to launch a kingside offensive, but it is hard to suggest anything else that isn't quite passive. Nigel was worried about ♗g5. After 18...♖xd1 19.♖xd1 ♖e8 Black is very passive.



19.♕g3

Perhaps even stronger is 19.f4. Black can't prevent the position from opening up for the bishops after 19...exf4 (as 19...f6? fails to 20.♘d5 ♗xd5 21.exd5 ♖xd5 22.♗f3) 20.♕xf4, and White is clearly better.

19...f6 20.f4 ♘d4

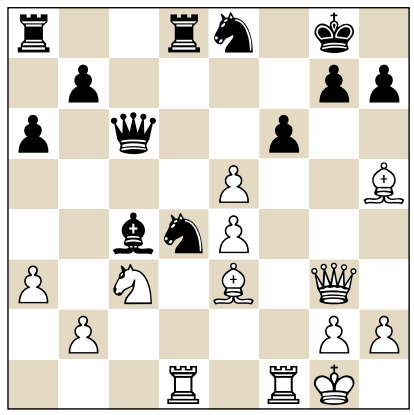


21.♗h5!

The immediate 21.fxe5 yields nothing after 21...♘xe2+ (White could hope for 21...♕xc3? 22.♗xd4 ♕xg3 23.hxg3 ♗b3 24.exf6, and White wins) 22.♘xe2 ♖xd1 23.♖xd1 ♕xe4.

21...♗c4 22.fxe5!

Natural and strong. I had decided before the match that the best way to compensate for my rust was to play to my attacking instincts whenever possible instead of, say, trying to warm up with conservative play and a few draws.

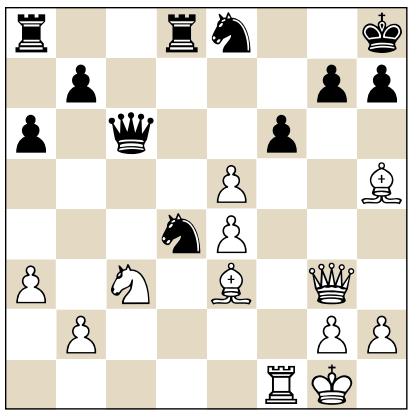


22...♗xf1 23.♖xf1

White doesn't need to rush or look for tricks. The bishops and open lines are more than enough compensation for the exchange. Less convincing was 23.♗xd4?! ♗c4 24.♗xe8 ♕xe8 25.exf6 ♕g6 26.♕xg6 hxg6 27.fxg7. And 23.♘d5? is a mistake that allows a strong queen sacrifice by Black: 23...♘e2+! 24.♗xe2 ♗xe2 25.♘e7+ ♔f7 (or 25...♔h8 26.♖xd8 ♕xe4 27.♖xa8 ♕b1+ 28.♗c1 ♕xc1+ 29.♔f2 ♕f1+ 30.♔e3 ♗h5, defending the knight and creating a perpetual check net. In a nice piece of sym-

metry the bishop can also go to b5 with the same result) 26.♘xc6 ♖xd1+ 27.♔f2 ♗b5 28.e6+ ♔g8 29.♘e7+ ♔f8 30.♗c5 ♖d2+ 31.♔e1 ♖c2, and the game will end in a perpetual.

23...♔h8

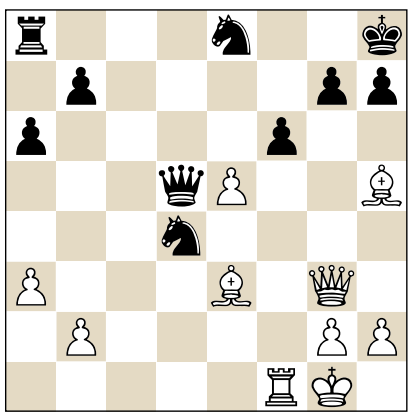


24.♘d5

The most human move, and probably still winning, but there was an immediate win with 24.♕h4!. I might have found this winner on the second day, but it was too hard for me to find in the first game of the first day. Some of the hardest moves in human chess are changing the angle or destination of an attack in progress. Here the sudden shift to h7 means Black has to scramble just to survive: 24...♘e6 25.♗g6 ♘f8 26.♗xe8 ♕xe8 27.exf6 and White is winning.

Bad was 24.♗xe8?, as Black saves his skin with 24...♕xc3! 25.♕xg7+ ♔xg7 26.exf6+ ♔f8 27.bxc3 ♘e2+ 28.♔f2 ♖xe8 29.♔xe2 ♖xe4.

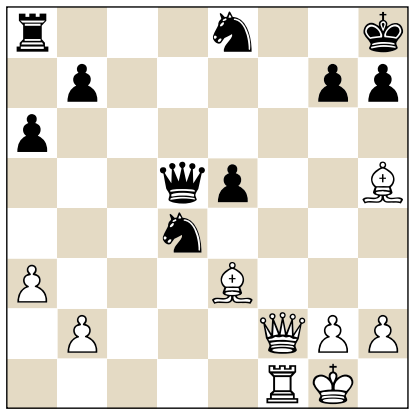
24...♖xd5 25.exd5 ♕xd5



26.♕f2?!

A missed opportunity, although the win is not yet completely spoiled. I joked after the game that I should have played 26.♔h1, the simplest and most natural way to preserve White's advantage. Because had I found the strongest move, 26.♕h3, I would have been playing at the Shamkir super-tournament that was underway at the time. After 26.♕h3! ♕e4 (as 26...♖d8 loses quickly to 27.♗g6 ♕g8 28.♗xd4 ♖xd4 29.e6) 27.♗g5 ♕xe5 28.♗g6 h6 29.♗xh6 Black is in deep trouble.

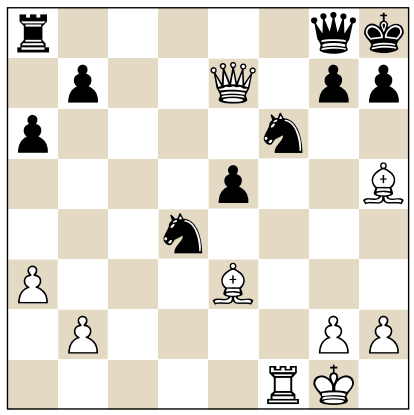
26...fxe5



27.♕f8+?

An unfortunate idea after rejecting the planned capture on d4. The planned 27.♗xd4 is still very good. I stopped looking at it when I saw he could play 27...♘f6, but White wins a pawn at the end and should still be winning: 27...♘f6 (27...exd4 28.♗f3 is what I saw at first, but I backed out too hastily after noticing 27...♘f6) 28.♗c3 ♘xh5 29.♗xe5. I missed this curious tick-tock of the bishop, d4-c3xe5, followed by winning a pawn with g4: 29...♔g8 30.g4.

27...♕g8 28.♕e7 ♘f6



29.♖xf6

Confirming an early habit for exchange sacrifices, although unfortunately it's not enough to tip the balance.

29...gxf6 30.♗h6 ♘f5 31.♕xf6+

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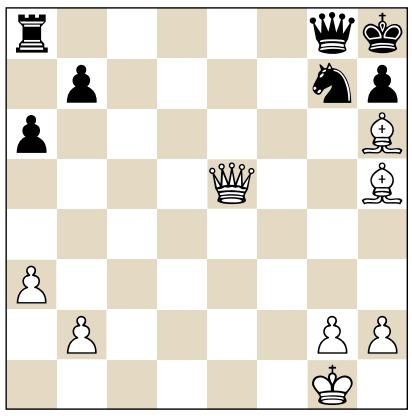
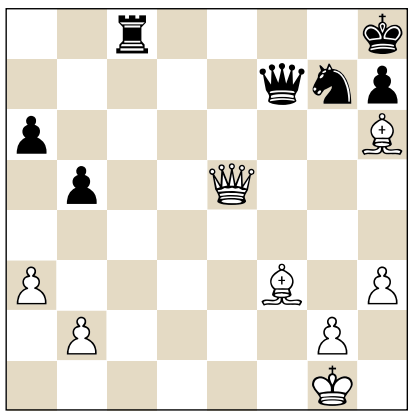
His chances were definitely better than in 1993 (when Kasparov famously predicted: 'It will be Short and it will be short'), but a jet-lag and an unchained attacking monster at the other side of the board proved too much for Nigel Short.

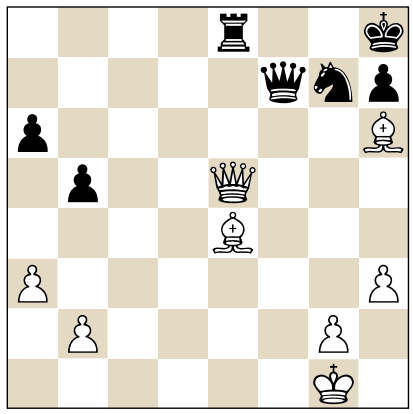
♘g7 32.♕xe5
A pretty bind, but it's not easy to increase the pressure.



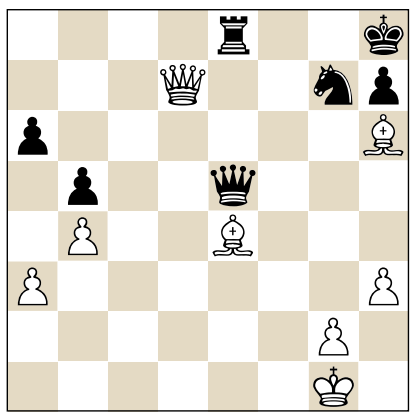
32...♖c8 33.♗f3 ♕f7 34.h3 b5



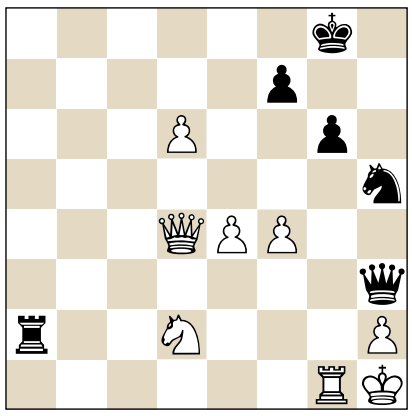
35.♗e4?
Terrible, based on a miscalculation and putting me on the brink of disaster. Here I should have followed the dictum of Botvinnik: a bishop fighting a rook must be protected by a pawn!
Paramount, therefore, was ♗d2, threatening to get the bishop to c3 with enough threats to keep White out of danger. After 35.♗d2 Black still has to find some good moves to keep the bishop from reaching c3. Missing this shows the effects of being away from chess for so long. Your instincts become more conservative, and it was hard for me to consider putting the bishop on an unprotected square: 35...♕e6. This or ...♕f5 allows Black to perpetually chase the White queen: 36.♕d4 (or 36.♕f4 ♕c4 37.♕f6 ♕e6) 36...♕c4 37.♕f6.
35...♖e8!
Kicking my queen out of its dominant position and going on the offensive at last.



36.♕d4
36.♗xg7+? ♔g8 is what I had missed when playing 35.♗e4.
36...♕e7 37.b4 ♕e5 38.♕d7

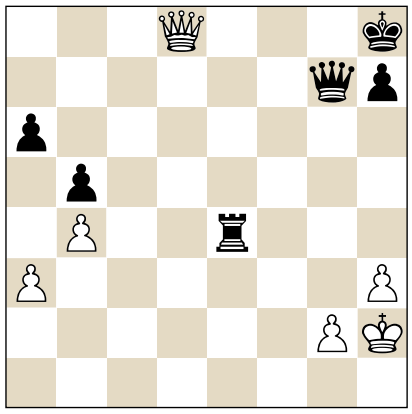


38...♕a1+
With his time advantage and a position with few risks for him, Nigel should have played on for a win instead of taking on e4. With 38...♖e7 he could have kept the game going with some pressure.
39.♔h2
If you'll indulge me, the comical computer move 39.♗b1 is worth including. All draws are equal to the machine! The only annotation for a move like this should be 'a move only a computer would make': 39...♕xb1+ 40.♔h2 ♕g6 41.♗xg7+ ♔g8 42.♗h6 ♕f7 (it's also a draw after 42...♖e5 43.♕c8+ ♔f7 44.♕f8+ ♔e6 45.♕c8+ ♔d5 46.♕c5+ ♔e4 47.♕c2+) 43.♕g4+, with a draw.
39...♖xe4?! 40.♗xg7+ ♕xg7 41.♕d8+
I played this and said 'Draw', and Nigel replied, 'We have to show the public the perpetual.' These were the exact words said to me by Lajos Portisch at the conclusion of our game in Moscow in 1981 when I offered the draw after playing 44...♘g3+ !



Portisch-Kasparov
Moscow 1981
position after 42. d6

42...♖xd2 43.♕xd2 ♕f3+ 44.♕g2 ♘g3+ 45.hxg3 ♕h5+ 46.♕h2 ♕f3+ 47.♖g2 ♕d1+ 48.♕g1 ♕h5+ 49.♖h2 ♕f3+, draw.



41...♕g8 42.♕f6+ ♕g7 43.♕d8+ ♕g8
Draw. A predictably uneven beginning, but a game that proved to me that my chances were all in the attack.

NOTES BY
Garry Kasparov

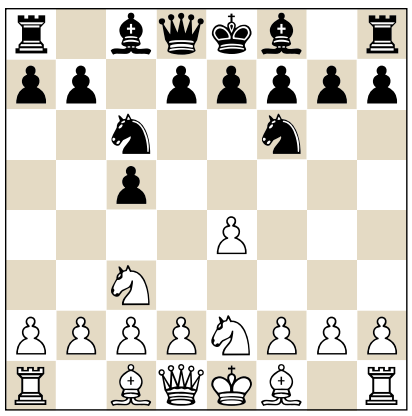
SI 28.1 – B63
Nigel Short
Garry Kasparov
St. Louis 2015 (6th blitz game)

1.e4 c5
My plan was to play various Sicilians if Nigel played 1.e4. I had played 1...e5 against him in Leuven and wanted

to change things up. If there were going to be any opening surprises, better that they came in the openings I know best and in unbalanced positions in which I could attack.

2.♘c3 ♘c6 3.♘ge2 ♘f6

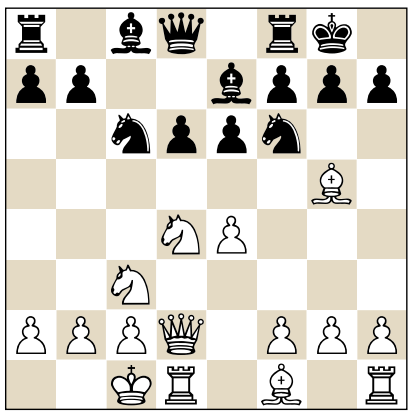
Ruining any hope Nigel had of a Grand Prix after 3...d6 4.f4. He's played just about everything against the Sicilian, of course, but ♗g5 isn't his favourite.



4.d4 cxd4 5.♘xd4 d6

The commentators and columnists were surprised, as I never favoured the Classical during my career, only using it in a few speed games. (My professional career, that is; after 1975. Before I turned 13, I played it quite often in local tournaments!) I decided that some surprise value and a mutual lack of preparation was better than over-reliance on dangerously outdated knowledge of my old favourites. I'd already played my preferred Najdorf in the rapid game to start the second day.

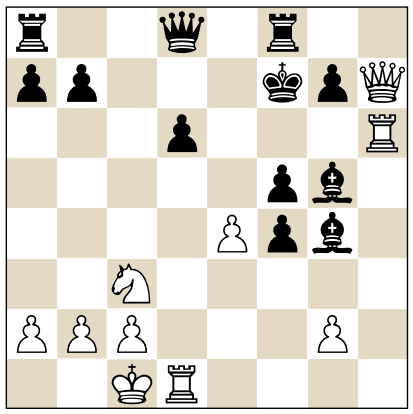
6.♗g5 e6 7.♕d2 ♗e7 8.0-0-0 0-0



9.h4

The most popular move by far is 9.f4, although I suspected Nigel might avoid it.

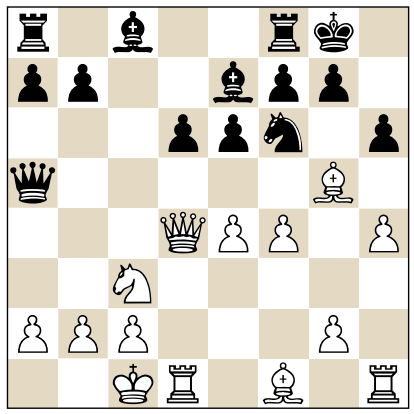
The main continuation is 9...h6 10.h4 ♘xd4 11.♕xd4 hxg5 12.hxg5 ♘g4 13.♗e2 e5 14.♕g1 exf4 15.♗xg4 ♗xg4 16.♕h2 f5 17.♕h7+ ♔f7 18.♖h6? (18.exf5! ♗xg5 19.♘e4 f3+ 20.♔b1 fxg2 21.♕g6+ ♔g8 22.♘xg5 ♗xf5 23.♕h5 gxh1♕ 24.♖xh1 ♕xg5 25.♕xg5 ♖ac8) 18...♗xg5



ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

19.♖hxd6 (19.♕g6+ is a perpetual, but Anand was in a must-win situation) 19...f3+ 20.♔b1 ♕xd6 21.♖xd6 fxg2 22.♕h2 ♗f3 23.♕g3 ♖h8 24.♕xg5 ♖h1+ 25.♘d1 g1♕ 26.♖d7+ ♔f8 27.♕xf5+ ♔g8 28.♕xf3 ♖f8 29.♕b3+ ♔h7, 0-1, Anand-Kasparov, Paris 1995.

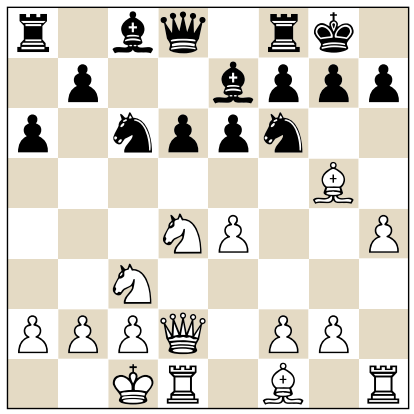
And another one is 9...♘xd4 10.♕xd4 ♕a5 11.h4 h6



ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

12.♕e3 ♖d8 13.♗e2 ♔f8 14.♔b1 d5 15.e5 hxg5 16.hxg5 ♘g8 17.♖h8 ♗b4 18.♘b5 ♗d7 19.a3 ♗e7 20.♖dh1 1-0, Venkatesh-Short, Myanmar 2014.

9...a6

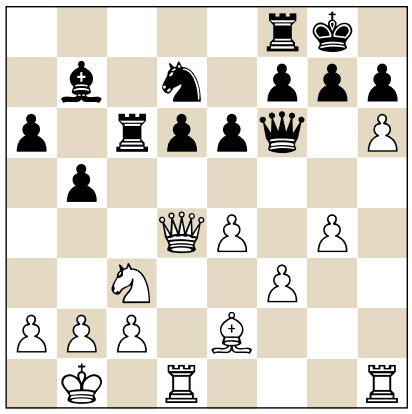


Here, too, 9...♘xd4 is an important alternative.

10.♔b1

Here an alternative is 10.f3 ♘xd4 11.♕xd4 b5 12.♔b1 (or 12.♗xf6

♗xf6 13.♕xd6 ♕xd6 14.♖xd6 ♗b7, with adequate compensation for the pawn, especially in blitz, e.g. 15.♖d7 ♗c6 16.♖c7 ♖fc8 17.♖xc8+ ♖xc8 18.♗d3 h5 19.g3 b4 20.♘e2 a5 21.♖d1 g6 22.♔b1 ♔f8 23.c4 a4 24.♗c2 ♗e8 25.b3 a3, and Black won in I.Gurevich-Kasparov, ICC 1998 (48)) 12...♗b7 13.♗d3 ♖c8 14.g4 ♘d7 15.♗xe7 ♕xe7 16.♗e2 ♖c6 17.h5 ♕f6 18.h6



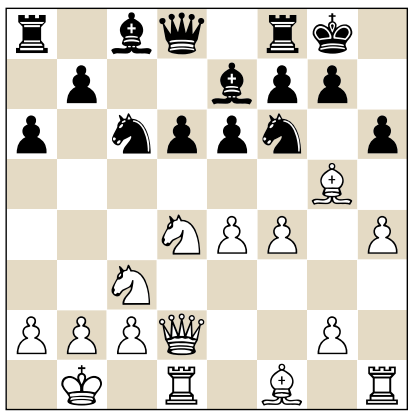
ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

18...g6 19.g5 ♕xd4 20.♖xd4 f6 21.gxf6 ♖xf6 22.a4 bxa4 23.♖hd1 ♔f8 24.e5 ♘xe5 25.♘e4 ♖f4 26.♘xd6 ♖xd4 27.♖xd4 ♖b6 28.♘xb7 ♖xb7 29.♖xa4 g5 30.♖a5 ♘f7 31.♗xa6, 1-0, Naiditsch-Greenfeld, Deizisau 2011.

10...h6

Technically a novelty, according to the databases, but 10.♔b1 is what takes it out of known GM lines with 10.f3.

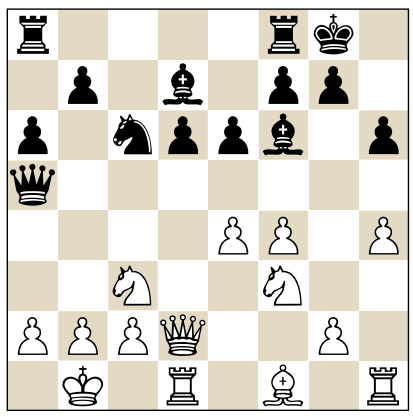
11.f4



11...♗d7

Of course I had no interest in finding out if it was possible for Black to defend after taking the bishop. My motto for the entire match was that the best defence was good offence. Bad is 11...hxg5? 12.♘xc6 bxc6 13.hxg5 ♘g4 14.♕e2 e5 15.f5, and White regains the piece with interest.

12.♗xf6 ♗xf6 13.♘f3 ♕a5

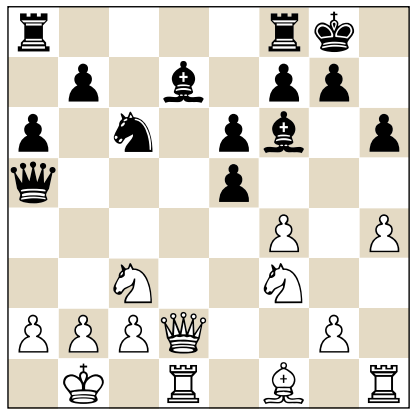


14.e5?

Nigel is fighting fire with fire and doesn't want to let Black capture on c3, but this is too much aggression and the tactics are in Black's favour. Better was 14.g4!? ♗xc3 15.♕xc3 ♕xc3 16.bxc3 d5! 17.exd5 exd5 18.♖g1 ♖fd8 19.g5 (19.♖xd5? favours Black: 19...♗xg4 20.♖xd8+ ♖xd8 21.♖xg4 ♖d1+ 22.♔b2 ♖xf1) 19...hxg5 20.♖xg5, with equality.

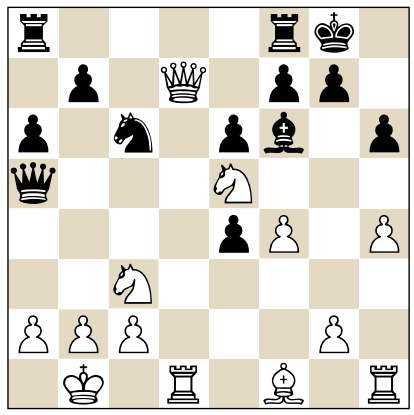
14.♕xd6? leads to an advantage for Black after 14...♗xc3 15.bxc3 ♖fd8 16.♕d2 e5! 17.♗c4 ♗e6 18.♗d5 ♗xd5 19.exd5 e4 20.♘e5 ♖ac8.

14...dxe5



15.♕xd7 There's not much point in trying to bail out in regret. After 15.fxe5 ♘xe5 16.♘xe5 ♗xe5 17.♕xd7 ♖ad8 18.♕e7 ♖xd1+ 19.♘xd1 ♕e1 20.♕d7 ♗f6! (only this) 21.g3 ♖d8 22.♗g2 ♕e2 White can resign.

15...e4 16.♘e5



16...♗xe5! The right move and a surprising one for Nigel. You'd expect Black to want to keep the bishop. The coming attack with 19...♕e1 is not common at all, however, and means

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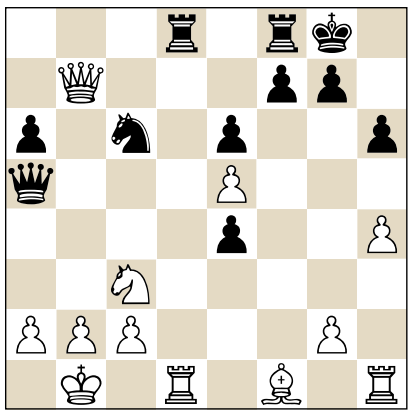
When in St. Louis, do 'a Caruana'. In an explosion of creativity, Garry Kasparov won the last seven games, good enough for a 3000 blitz performance.

that this time things are different! After 16...♘xe5 17.fxe5 ♗xe5 18.♕d2 (the only move) 18...♖ad8 19.♕e1 ♗xc3 20.bxc3 ♖xd1+ 21.♕xd1 ♕xc3 22.♖h3, White keeps an edge.

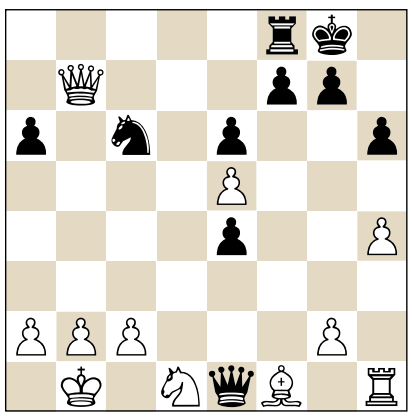
17.fxe5 ♖ad8 18.♕xb7



18...♖xd1+

18...♕xc3?! sadly fails to 19.♗xa6!.

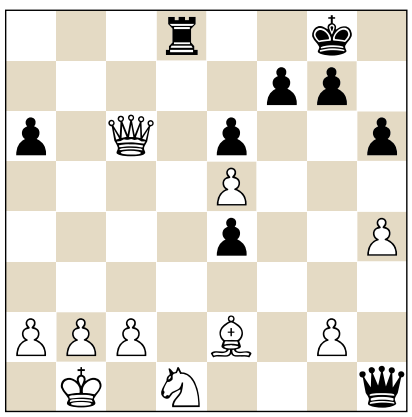
19.♘xd1 ♕e1



A picturesque line of pieces on the first rank.

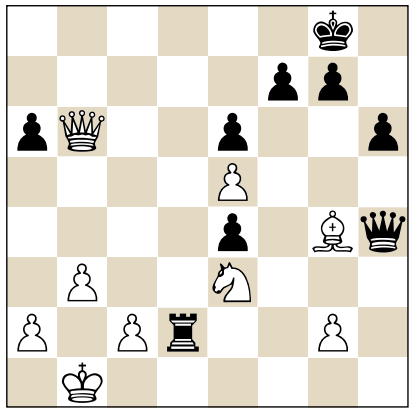
20.♗e2 20.b3 leads to a sharp position in which I'd planned to play on instead of taking the repetition: 20...♕xd1+ 21.♔b2 ♕d4+ 22.♔b1 ♘xe5 (or 22...♘b4!? 23.♗c4 a5, and Black has the initiative) 23.♗xa6 ♘g4, with the better chances for Black.

20...♕xh1 21.♕xc6 ♖d8



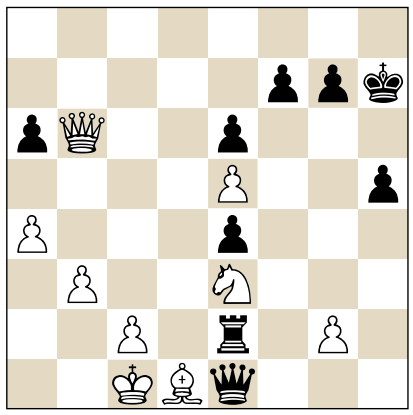
22.b4? The position is very difficult for White and this gives the rampaging black queen another target. Both 22.b3 and moving the a-pawn would require more precision from Black to win, although White would still have to find some very difficult moves in just seconds.

Let's first look at 22.b3 ♕e1 23.♗g4 (23.♕xa6 ♖xd1+ 24.♗xd1 ♕xd1+ 25.♔b2 ♕d4+ 26.c3 ♕f2+ 27.♔a3 e3 28.♕a8+ ♔h7 29.♕e4+ g6 30.♕d4 ♕g3 and Black wins) 23...♕xh4 24.♕b6 ♖d2 25.♘e3. Easy enough for a computer to construct this tenuous chain of pieces, but it's hard to believe it over the board, or to hold up for very long:



ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

25...♔h7 (preparing ...h5, and White faces insurmountable challenges. The immediate 25...h5? runs into 26.♗xe6! fxe6 27.♕xe6+ ♔h8 28.♕e8+ ♔h7 29.e6 ♕e1+ 30.♔b2 ♕xe3 31.♕xh5+ =) 26.a4 h5 27.♗d1 ♕e1 28.♔c1 ♖e2, and wins.

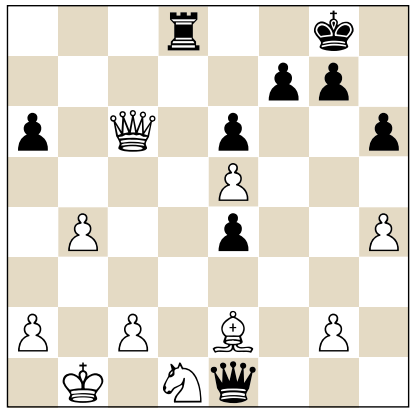


ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

Another visually amusing conclusion. After 22.a4 ♖xd1+ 23.♗xd1 ♕xd1+ 24.♔a2 ♕d4 Black should be objectively winning, though it goes without saying that there would be a lot of fight left in a blitz game with queens and passed pawns.

22...♕e1!

The trick being that the black e-pawn is immune thanks to the pin on the bishop.



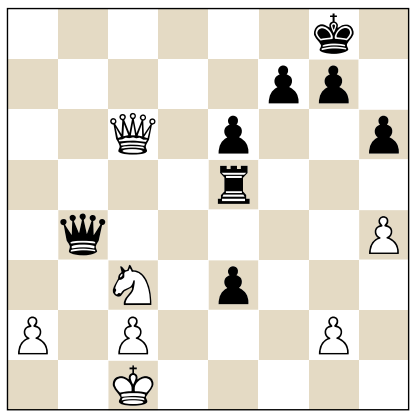
23.♕xa6

23.♕xe4 ♖xd1+ 24.♔b2 loses to 24...♖b1+ 25.♔a3 ♕c3+ 26.♔a4 ♖b2.

23...♕xb4+

Suddenly there is a decisive attack thanks to the b-pawn overstepping its bounds by one square.

24.♔c1 ♕d2+ 25.♔b2 ♖b8+ 26.♗b5 ♕b4+ 27.♔c1 ♖xb5 28.♘c3 ♖xe5 29.♕c6 e3



White resigned. ■

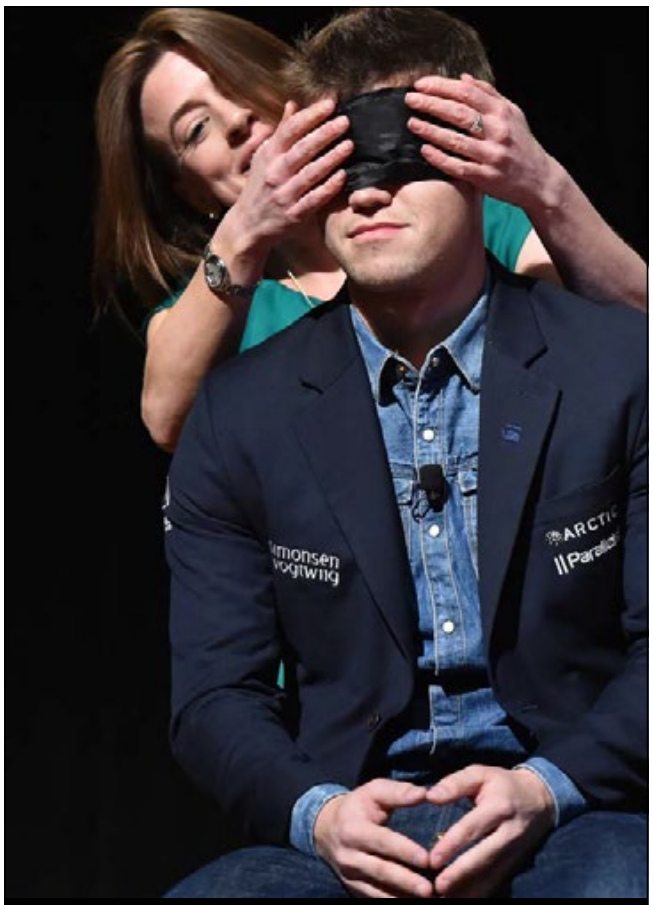
St. Louis 2015

				1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
1 Garry Kasparov	IGM	RUS	2812	½	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	8½
2 Nigel Short	IGM	ENG	2664	½	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1½

Games 1 and 6 rapid, the others blitz

Closed Eyes and Open Mouths

At the prestigious Sohn Conference in New York, the main topic is money. And money. But a blindfold simul by Magnus Carlsen left the billionaires and millionaires speechless, as **Dylan Loeb McClain** witnessed.



To make sure he really had to rely on his mind's eye only, Magnus Carlsen was blindfolded before he took on his three opponents.

In early May, Magnus Carlsen strode on to the stage at Avery Fisher Hall in New York City to play a blindfold exhibition against three players. The number of opponents was hardly remarkable – Carlsen had played 10 people simultaneously blindfold in early 2012 for the American news program *60 Minutes*, winning all the games.

But this exhibition was different. For one thing, there was the setting. The occasion was the 20th Sohn Conference, which has become the world's largest annual gathering of investors and financiers. The conference speakers featured some of America's top money managers and investors, including William A. Ackman of Pershing Square Capital Management, David Einhorn of Greenlight Capital, David Tepper of Appaloosa Management and Leon G. Cooperman of Omega Advisors.

The bigger twist than the high-powered audience was that Carlsen would be playing with clocks, where he and his opponents each had a total of nine minutes. Unlike in a normal simul, blindfold or with sight of the boards, he would have to respond to moves in a random order, as each of his opponents moved, and under time pressure. As far as anyone knew, no one had ever attempted such an exhibition.

'Magnus, you ready for this?' asked Maurice Ashley, the American grandmaster who was acting as master of ceremonies.

Carlsen half shrugged, smiled and replied, 'I've never done this before, so I wouldn't know.' The audience of 3,000 people laughed.

As it turned out, any doubts that Carlsen may have had were unfounded. He dispatched his opponents – Paul Hoffman, chief executive of the Liberty Science Center in

New Jersey, J. Christopher Flowers, the chairman of J.C. Flowers & Company, and Gbenga Akinnagbe, a star of the HBO series *The Wire* – though he said afterward that it was not as easy as it looked. 'It was really stressful with a limited amount of time', he told Ashley.

Later, Ashley shook his head, almost in disbelief. 'I've never seen anything like that', he said. He was not the only one. Several days later, Garry Kasparov, the former World Champion, heard the details of the event and was also stunned.

The idea for the exhibition came from Douglas Hirsch, a founder and managing partner of Seneca Capital and also a co-founder of the Sohn Conference, which raises money to fight pediatric cancer. (The conference is named after a friend of Hirsch's, Ira Sohn, who died of the disease when he was 29.) Hirsch, who took the game up later in life but has gotten his rating to about 1800, has become friends with Carlsen.

Hirsch thought the exhibition would be entertaining and a nice change for the investors. 'I felt that as a spectator, you wouldn't need to know anything about chess to understand and appreciate the brain power required', he wrote in an email. He suggested the idea to Carlsen, who readily accepted because it was for charity and because it would be 'fun and challenging.'

The response was even better than Hirsch had hoped. Hirsch wrote, 'It was without question the single event that everyone was talking about, despite many of the world's elite money managers sharing their most compelling money-making ideas.'

Indeed, the billionaires and high-powered audience were mesmerized. Ackman, who was waiting to give his speech and was standing off-stage during the exhibition, stood transfixed. When Carlsen came off the stage, Ackman, who is usually the one receiving adulation, bounded up to Carlsen to shake his hand and pose for a picture with him. 'That was incredible', Ackman said.

Ian Bremmer, the president of the Eurasia Group, the world's largest political risk consulting firm, was also watching Carlsen from off-stage. He used to play chess when he was younger but quit years ago. He was effusive about Carlsen's performance. 'It was the most impressive thing of the conference, my speech included', he said, adding that it was 'a master stroke of the organizers.'

In addition to Carlsen's exhibition, Susan Polgar, the former women's World Champion, gave a simul (this time the normal kind, with sight of the boards) against 25 people during the cocktail reception that followed.

There were other grandmasters in attendance as well, including Lev Alburt, Maxim Dlugy, Gennady Sagalchik, Anatoly Bykhovsky (who made Carlsen's moves on stage), Pascal Charbonneau (who called out the moves by Carlsen's opponents), and Patrick Wolff.

JOHANNES BERG

William A. Ackman, usually the one receiving adulation, very much wanted a picture with the champ.

Wolff was more than an interested spectator. He has his own fund, with about $200 million under management, and is the chairman of the Sohn Conference in San Francisco. (Sohn also has conferences in London, Hong Kong and Toronto.)

That Carlsen accepted the invitation to give the exhibition is not surprising. Being World Champion offers a player opportunities to promote himself and the game. Not every champion has taken full advantage, but Carlsen appears to be doing so.

He has been involved in the development of a smartphone chess app (Play Magnus), been a spokesmodel for a popular brand of clothing (G-Star Raw) and recently teamed up for a marketing campaign with the Scandinavian airline SAS, which included a simul against 12 people at the Marshall Chess Club in New York the day after the Sohn Conference.

He has frequently been a guest on television shows in Europe and the United States, appeared at the International Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas in 2014, gone on a speaking and promotional tour of Silicon Valley, and visited schools to encourage more children to play chess.

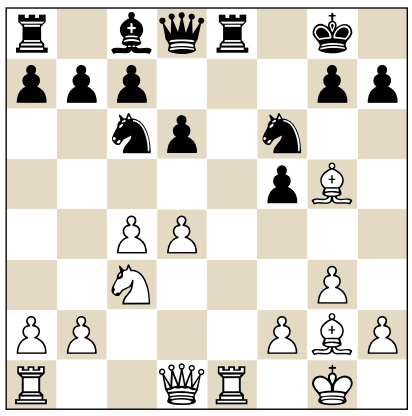
He is also interested in charity work. He and Hirsch are on the board of America's Foundation for Chess, another charity, which uses chess as a teaching tool in schools across the country. The evening after Sohn (and a few hours after the simul at the Marshall Chess Club), he was the guest of honour at America's Foundation for Chess annual charity dinner, which was at Carnegie Hall.

Showing that a champion's work is never done, he gave another simul to 20 guests. And won every game.

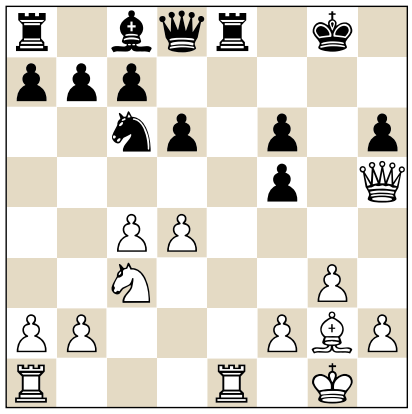
Magnus Carlsen
Gbenga Akinnagbe
New York 2015

1.c4 e5 2.g3 ♘c6 3.♗g2 f5 4.♘c3 ♘f6 5.e3 ♗c5 6.♘ge2 0-0 7.d4 exd4 8.exd4 ♗b4 9.0-0 ♗xc3 10.♘xc3 d6 11.♖e1 ♖e8 12.♗g5

Master of ceremonies Maurice Ashley was in awe of Magnus Carlsen's performance: 'I've never seen anything like that.'



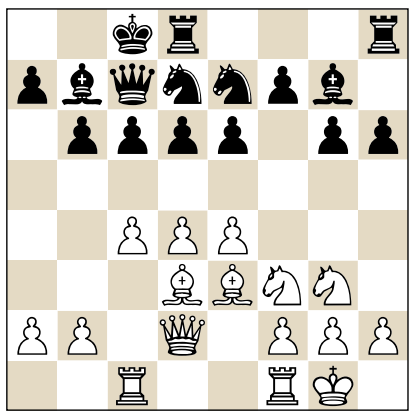
12...h6 A blunder, though even 12...♗d7 would have run into problems after 13.♘d5. **13.♗xf6 gxf6** A second blunder. 13...♖xe1+ 14.♕xe1 ♕xf6 offered a little more resistance. **14.♕h5**



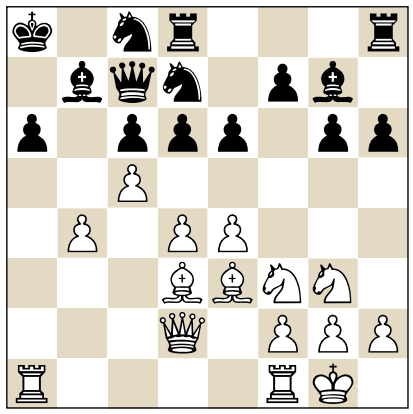
At this point, Ashley commented that Black had only 2:44 left on his clock, to which Carlsen said, 'It is more relevant that the position is lost.' **14...♗e6 15.♕g6+ ♔f8 16.♕xh6+ ♔f7 17.d5 ♖h8 18.dxe6+ ♔e7 19.♘d5+** Carlsen announced a mate in one after calling out his move. **19...♔e8 20.♕xh8** Mate.

Magnus Carlsen
J. Christopher Flowers
New York 2015

1.e4 b6 2.d4 ♗b7 3.♗d3 g6 4.c4 ♗g7 5.♘f3 d6 6.♘c3 e6 7.0-0 h6 8.♗e3 ♘e7 9.♕d2 ♘d7 10.♘e2 c6 11.♘g3 ♕c7 12.♖ac1 0-0-0



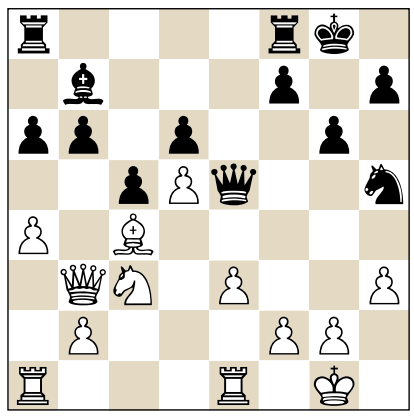
When Carlsen heard this move, he said, 'That was risky', which got a big laugh from the audience.
13.b4 ♔b8 14.a4 ♘c8 15.a5 ♔a8 16.axb6 ♘cxb6 17.♖a1 a6 18.c5 ♘c8



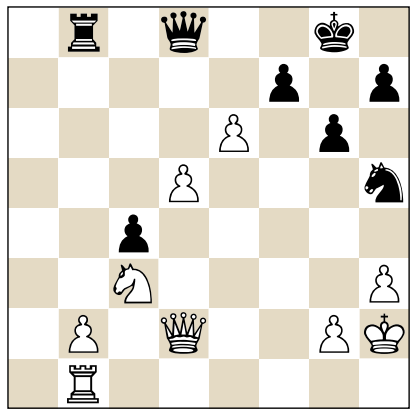
19.♗xa6 ♔b8 20.♗xb7 ♕xb7 21.cxd6 ♘xd6 22.♗f4 e5 23.dxe5 ♘xe5 24.♘xe5 ♗xe5 25.♗xe5 ♕c7 26.♕a2 ♕b7 27.♖fd1 ♔c7 28.♕xf7+ 1-0

Magnus Carlsen
Paul Hoffman
New York 2015

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 e6 4.♘c3 exd5 5.cxd5 d6 6.♘f3 g6 7.♗f4 a6 8.a4 ♗g7 9.e3 0-0 10.h3 ♕e7 11.♗e2 ♘bd7 12.0-0 b6 13.♖e1 ♗b7 14.♗c4 ♘h5 15.♗h2 ♘e5 16.♘xe5 ♗xe5 17.♗xe5 ♕xe5 18.♕b3

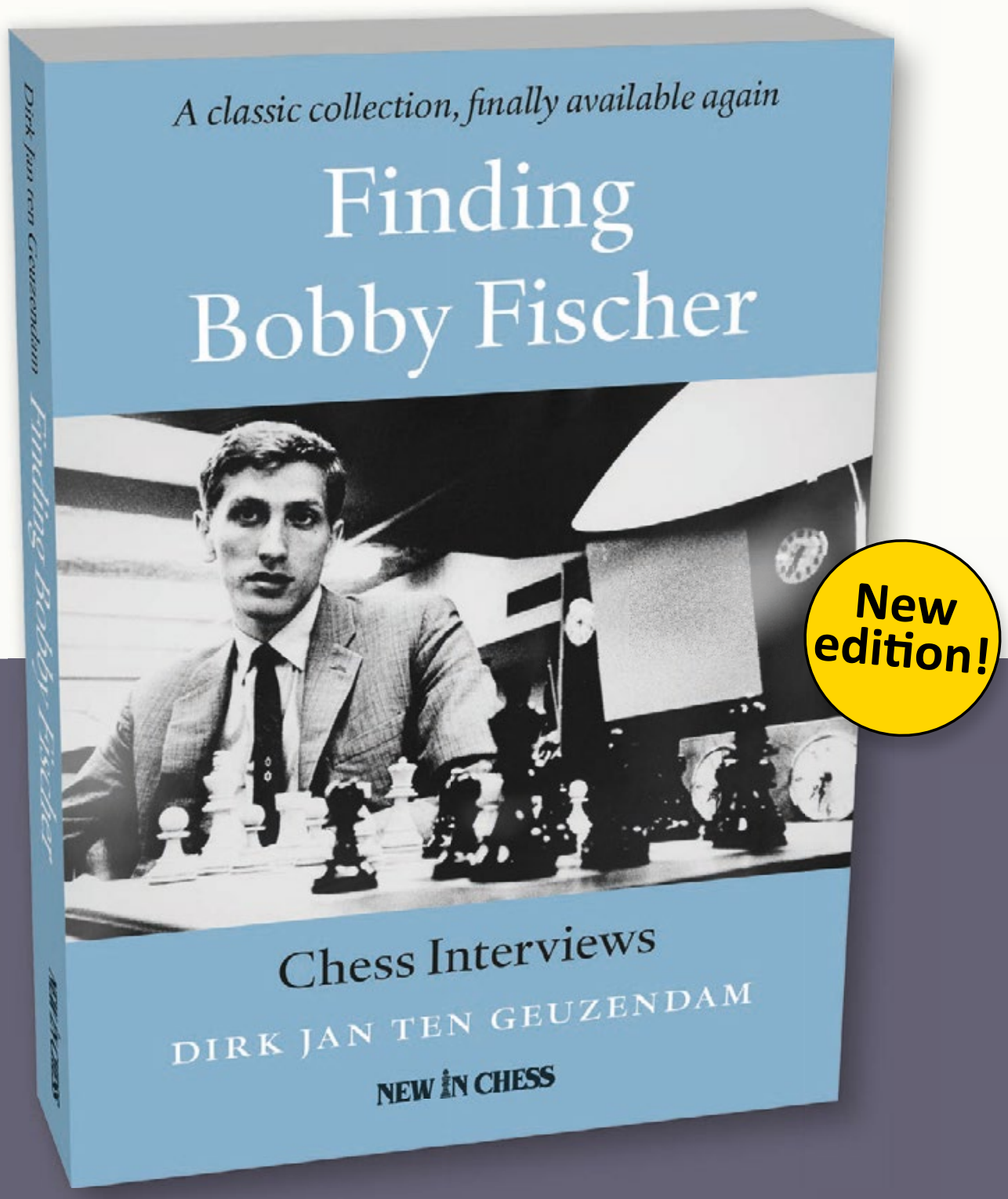


18...♖fb8 After he heard this move, Carlsen commented, 'Makes sense.'
19.♖ad1 ♗c8 20.f4 ♕e7 21.♕c2 ♗d7 22.♕e2 ♕e8 23.♖a1 b5 24.axb5 axb5 25.♖xa8 ♖xa8 26.♗xb5 ♗xb5 27.♕xb5 ♕d8 28.♕d3 ♖b8 29.♕d2 ♕b6 30.♖b1 ♕b3 31.e4 c4 32.e5 ♕b6+ 33.♔h2 dxe5 34.fxe5 ♕d8 35.e6



At this point, Hoffman's time expired. Afterward, Carlsen congratulated Hoffman on how well he had played. ■

Brimming with anecdotes and revealing insights



Polugaevsky, Niemeijer, Botvinnik, Krabbé, Karpov, Timman, Kasparov, Hort, Kortchnoi, Gligoric, Spassky, Portisch, Najdorf, Xie Jun, Larsen, Smyslov, Kramnik, Judit Polgar, Anand, Bobby Fischer

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Sadler on Books

Into the ♗g5 Najdorf Labyrinth

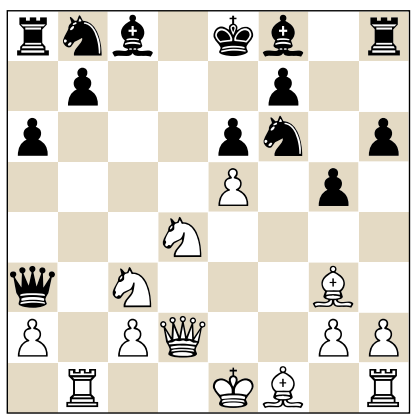
When my mid-life crisis comes, you're not going to see me riding a Harley-Davidson, hair down to my shoulders with a 20-year old blonde on my arm. No, I suspect I'll pine for my lost youth in another way, trying to revive the time when I could remember variations up to move 40 and would leave my king in the centre with an insouciant shrug of the shoulders. Yes, when you see me playing the Najdorf again, you'll know I'm going through a difficult patch!

This last month was a good month for 6.♗g5 Najdorf fans as both *The Sicilian Najdorf 6.♗g5* by Kevin Goh Wei Ming (Everyman Chess) and *1.e4 vs The Sicilian I* by Parimarjan Negi (Quality Chess) appeared. I think it must be getting to be every author's nightmare to bring out a book on the same subject as Negi: your own book is always going to suffer in comparison however much merit it has!

In fact, I wasn't 100% sure quite what the idea was of Goh Wei Ming's book. Is it a repertoire for White or a complete treatise of the 6.♗g5 Najdorf? I don't think it's the first as I'm often very unsure precisely which line he is recommending for White. But for the second, too many critical lines (coincidentally, many of the lines that Negi recommends in his book) are not covered, or covered insufficiently deeply. In the end, I just decided to view it as the thoughts of a 6.♗g5 aficionado on the opening and to judge it on those merits. Negi's book is very definitely a repertoire book for White and from that point of view, it's 100% worked out as far as I can see – no missing move orders, which in this line is quite an achievement!

Negi's book is absolutely stunning. My jaw just kept on dropping at the attacking ideas that Negi exposes in this book. Just as in his previous book on the Caro-Kann & French, there is that beautiful mix of computer analysis, database research (including correspondence games) and superb insight that makes it a real learning experience as well as a super-GM repertory. But he isn't perfect you know! After receiving those books I kept an eye on the Najdorf games in the past month and of course the following variation jumped out at me straightaway!

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.♗g5 e6 7.f4 ♕b6 8.♕d2 ♕xb2 9.♖b1 ♕a3 10.e5 h6 11.♗h4 dxe5 12.fxe5 g5 13.♗g3

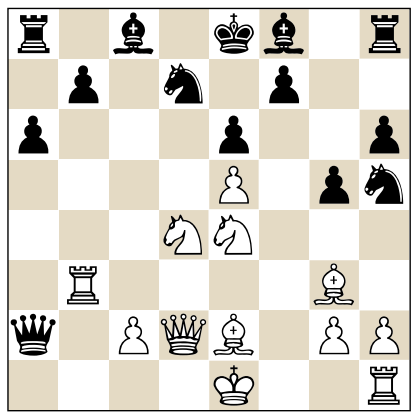


'The poor cousin of 13.♗f2', according to Negi (who does indeed provide a super chapter on 13.♗f2), but Goh Wei Ming was very enthusiastic about the idea: 'It's a lot more interesting than I initially thought. White typically ends up sacrificing a couple of pawns for very unclear compensation.' Goh Wei Ming provides a lot of interesting ideas in this line, and clearly Radjabov shares his opinion. Having spent a little time on this, I agree too!

13...♘h5 14.♘e4 ♘d7

Worthy of attention, according to Goh Wei Ming, but looks like nothing more than a transposition back into the normal 14...♕xa2 line.

15.♖b3 ♕xa2 16.♗e2

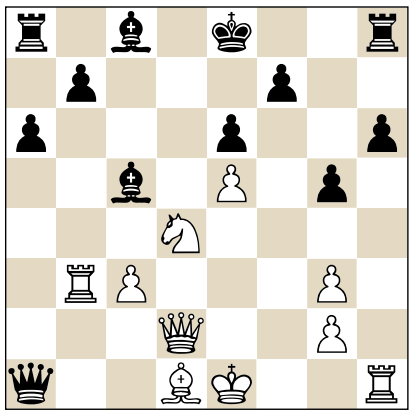


Untried according to Goh Wei Ming and not mentioned by Negi.

16...♕a1+

16...♘c5 is a blunder, I guess (16...♕a1+ was given by Goh Wei Ming): 17.♘c3 ♘xb3 18.♘xb3 ♗b4 19.♗xh5 ♕b2 20.0-0 ♕xc3 21.♗xf7+ ♔e7 22.♕f2 ♔d7 23.♕b6 ♖f8 24.♗e1 1-0, Radjabov-Grischuk, Tbilisi FIDE Grand Prix 2015.

17.♗d1 ♘c5 18.♘xc5 ♘xg3 19.hxg3 ♗xc5 20.c3

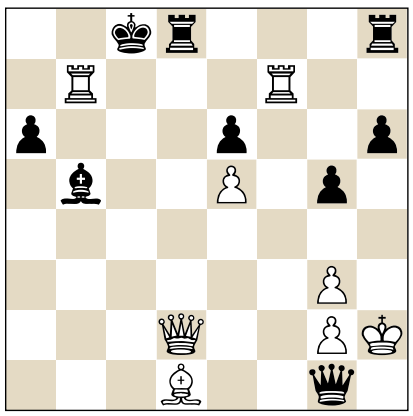


As Goh Wei Ming comments, 'Black has 2 extra pawns but his king is draughty and it looks like White is perfectly poised to triple on the f-file in the next 5-6 moves. White has interesting compensation here.'

20...♕a5

Goh Wei Ming's move.

20...♗d7 was an idea I had in the train while reading the book. You often see that you can make use of the temporary power of a queen in an advanced position to launch a quick counter-attack, and this is no exception. The computer confirmed the viability of the line... but it's no advantage for Black! 21.♖xb7 (21.0-0 ♗b5 22.♗e2 ♕a4 23.♗xb5+ axb5 followed by ...♖d8 seems pretty good for Black) 21...0-0-0 (startling castling!) 22.0-0 ♗b5. Unfortunately White is doing just fine after 23.♖fxf7 ♗xd4+ 24.cxd4 ♕xd4+ 25.♔h2 ♕g1+.

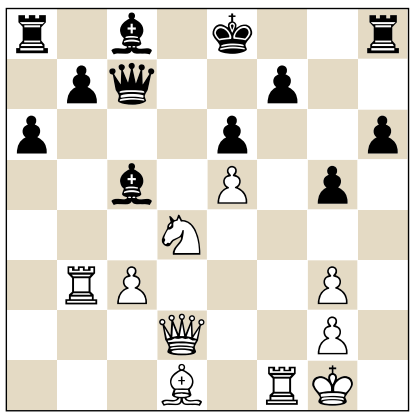


ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

Pointed out by Stockfish. I hadn't spotted this ♔h2 idea! 26.♔xg1 ♖xd2 27.♗f3 ♖d7 28.♖fxd7 ♗xd7 29.♖a7 ♖d8 is about equal.

21.0-0 ♕c7

White's position looks very ugly, but Black is struggling to find a safe spot for his king. The queenside is the most obvious haven, but Black needs to have a good answer to the pressure White can generate on the h1-a8 diagonal (and the b7-pawn) with the simple ♗f3. If Black can get away with ...b5 and ...♗b7, then that is by far the most efficient solution.



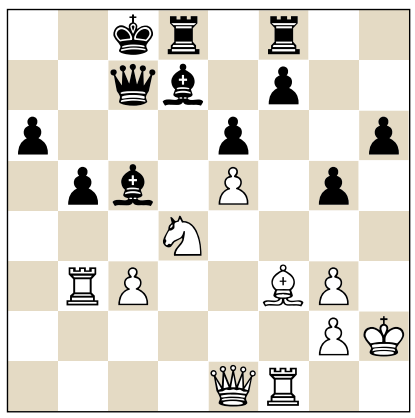
22.♕e3 Goh Wei Ming's suggestion. It's not easy to find the best square for the queen, as each choice has advantages and disadvantages. ♕e3 gives the white queen access to f3 and also introduces some discovered knight attack tactics under the right circumstances.

> 'It must be getting to be every author's nightmare to bring out a book on the same subject as Negi'

Intuitively I felt that White would rather delay 22.♗h5, as ...♖f8 is quite a useful defensive move while White might prefer to play ♗f3 in some cases rather than ♗h5. However, dragging the rook away from the h-file has advantages too. (I guess that White was worried that Black might meet the immediate 22.♕e1 h5.)

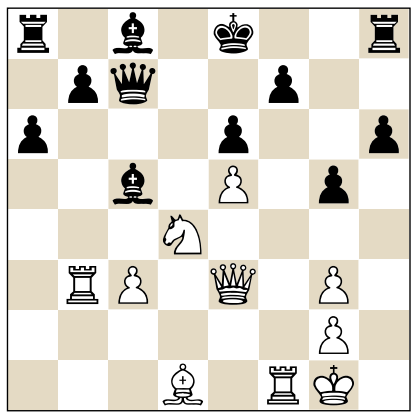
22...♖f8 23.♕e1 (an interesting place for the white queen: it gives White an extra attacking possibility in comparison to ♕e3. The move 23.♕e2! might be similar) 23...♗d7 24.♔h2 0-0-0 25.♗f3 b5

Chess Developments: The Sicilian Najdorf 6.♗g5
by Kevin Goh Wei Ming
Everyman Chess
2014
★★★★☆



ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

26.♕a1 (attempts to make use of the queen's position on the back rank; 26.♕e4 ♕b6 27.♖b2 ♔c7 28.♖a1 h5 29.c4 ♗xd4 30.cxb5 ♗xb5 31.♖c1+ ♔d7 32.♖c4 ♗xb2 33.♕d3+ 0-1, Van Foreest-Kevlishvili, Amsterdam 2015) 26...♕b6 27.♖f2 followed by ♖a2 could be quite tricky for Black.



22...b5 This felt very loosening when I first saw it, but it does have the advantage of neutralising any potential White's piece pressure against b7 (via a rook on b3 plus a bishop on f3).

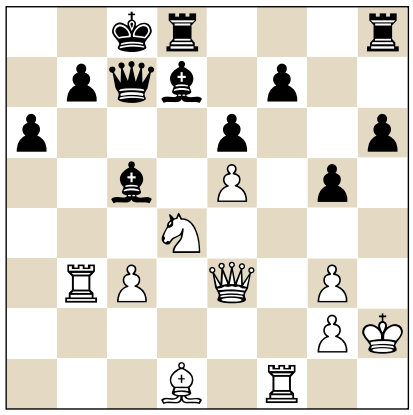
22...a5, aiming to distract White's pieces by pushing the a-pawn as far

Sadler on Books

as possible, is a very popular engine choice, but it's a pretty tough move for a human to play!

22...0-0 23.♖f6 ♔g7 24.♖b2 ♕e7 25.♖bf2 ♗d7 26.♗c2 is unsurprisingly far too dangerous for Black.

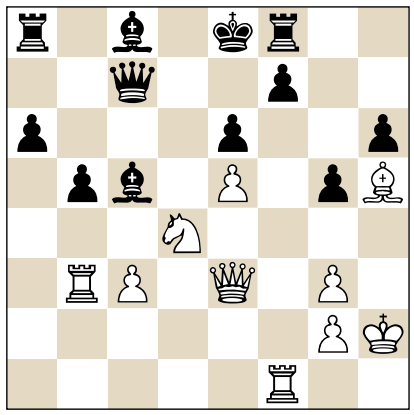
22...♗d7 was my intuitive choice, preparing to either castle queenside (even at the cost of the f7-pawn if necessary) or to block White's potential pressure along the h1-a8 diagonal with ...♗c6. 23.♔h2 (23.♖xf7 ♔xf7 24.♕f3+ ♔g8 25.♖xb7 ♕c8 26.♖xd7 ♕xd7 27.♕xa8+ ♔g7 is winning for Black, which the computer confirms) 23...0-0-0



ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

24.♗f3 (an awkward little move for Black: Black can't neutralise the pressure on the h1-a8 diagonal with his bishop and so has to weaken his king's position; 24.♖xf7 ♖df8 25.♖g7 ♖fg8 26.♖f7 ♖f8 looks like a repetition to me) 24...b5 25.♕e4 ♕b6 leads to similar lines to Van Foreest-Kevlishvili, Amsterdam 2015, though without the extra ...♖hf8 for Black. Not completely clear in whose favour that is actually! ...h5-h4 will create far more threats with the rook on h8 than on f8! This type of position can be uncomfortable in a practical game, but objectively you feel Black should be fine: White doesn't have enough dark squares to really hurt the black king. 26.♖c1 looks pretty natural, looking for ideas like c4 ...b4, ♘b5, or even maybe just to play ♖bb1 / ♘b3 and then follow up with c4.

23.♗h5 ♖f8 24.♔h2



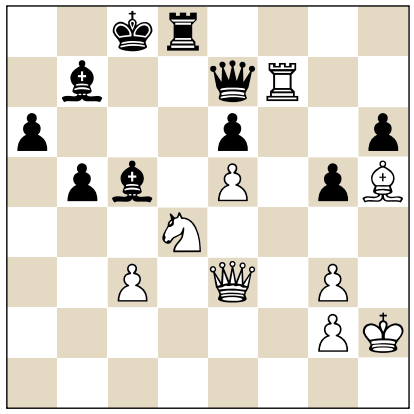
This was Goh Wei Ming's line, with ♖f6 and ♖b2-f2 to follow. At first I thought this was awesomely strong.

24...♕d7

This is a very annoying move: Black's queen is better-placed on d7 than on e7 once White captures on f7.

24...♗b7 25.♘xe6 ♕c6 26.♕f3 wins the exchange for White, which should be a slight edge.

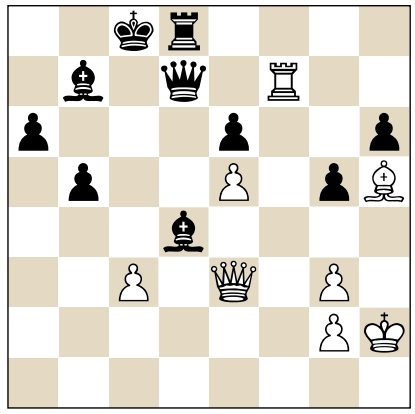
24...♕e7 was the only move I considered originally: 25.♖b2 ♗b7 26.♖bf2 0-0-0 27.♖xf7 ♖xf7 28.♖xf7



ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

28...♗xd4 (28...♕e8 looked very dodgy for Black and the computer points out 29.♕e2 ♗xd4 30.♖xb7 ♕c6 31.♗f3) 29.cxd4 ♕b4 30.d5 (much stronger than the 30.♗f3 I'd seen) 30...♖xd5 31.♕b6 wins.

25.♖b2 ♗b7 26.♖bf2 0-0-0 27.♖xf7 ♖xf7 28.♖xf7 ♗xd4



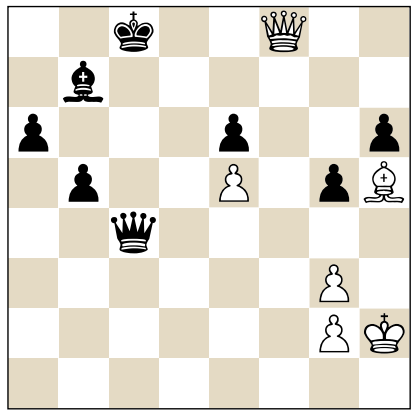
29.cxd4

29.♕c1 was my original attempt, but 29...♕c6 30.♗f3 ♕xc3 31.♗xb7+ ♔b8 32.♕b1 ♗xe5 33.♗f3 ♖d4 is unfortunately more dangerous for the white king than for the black king.

29...♕xd4

Which leads to peace offerings after

30.♕c1+ ♕c4 31.♕a3 ♖d7 32.♖xd7 ♔xd7 33.♕d6+ ♔c8 34.♕f8+



34...♔c7 If 34...♔d7, 35.♗e8+ wins!

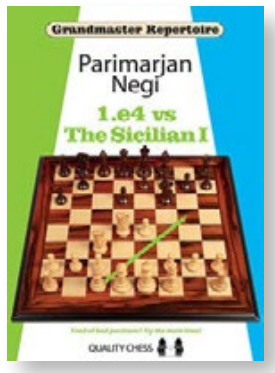
35.♕d6+

So well done Goh Wei Ming! Definitely a dangerous idea!

In conclusion, both very interesting books, both must haves for the 6.♗g5 Najdorf addict!

■ ■ ■

GM Repertoire 1.e4 vs The Sicilian I
by Parimarjan Negi
Quality Chess
2015
★★★★★



New In Chess Stars

★★★★★	Instant classic
★★★★☆	Excellent
★★★☆☆	Good
★★☆☆☆	Mediocre
★☆☆☆☆	Awful

Finally, we take a quick look at *The English Attack against the Taimanov Sicilian* by Zaven Andriasyan (New In Chess). In a way the timing of the book is a little unlucky. At a time when the variation 1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘d4 ♘c6 5.♘c3 ♕c7 6.♗e3 a6 7.♕f3 is getting extremely popular, it's a shame to have a book that only looks at 7.♕d2! All the same it's a good clear thorough look at the 7.♕d2 variations with a nice mix of analysis and concise explanation.

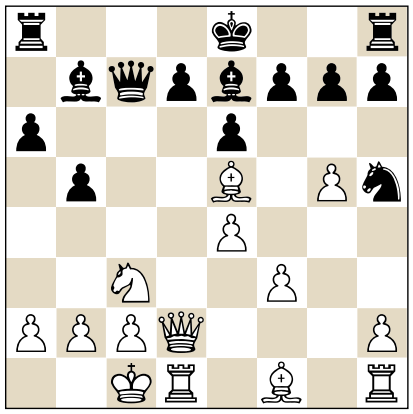
I was spectating at the Philadelphia Open in April during a holiday in America and I saw two games in the following variation by the young Indian IM Chandra and the American FM Seth Homa against two 2600 Cuban GMs. Black held both games with consummate ease. Unaware of the theory I was amazed that both White players chose to enter this variation so it was interesting to check the line in this book afterwards:

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘c6 5.♘c3 ♕c7 6.♗e3 a6 7.♕d2 ♘f6 8.f3 ♗e7 9.0-0-0 b5 10.g4 ♘xd4

10...0-0 is Andriasyan's main line, but the text – played in the game Ter Sahakyan-Polgar, Yerevan 2014, also gets copious attention.

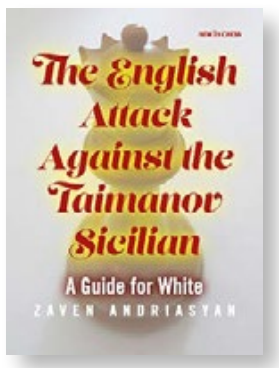
11.♗xd4 Andriasyan considers 11.♕xd4 to be a small advantage for White after 11...♗b7 12.g5 ♘h5 13.♔b1 ♖c8 14.♕d2 b4 15.♘a4 d5 16.♗d3 0-0 17.♖he1.

11...♗b7 12.g5 ♘h5 13.♗e5



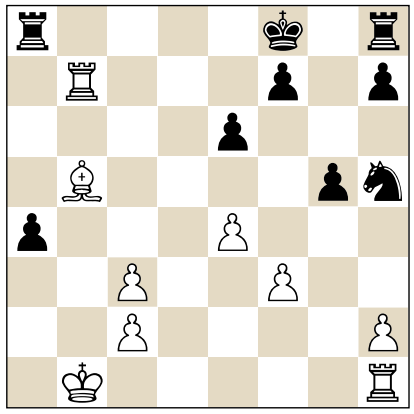
13...♕xe5 14.♕xd7+ ♔f8 15.♕xb7 ♗xg5+ 16.♔b1 ♕b8

The English Attack against the Taimanov Sicilian
by Zaven Andriasyan
New In Chess 2015
★★★☆☆



17.♖d7 (Andriasyan's main line)
In Philadelphia I saw 17.♕c6 ♕c8 18.♕xc8+ ♖xc8 19.♖d7 ♖d8 20.♖b7 ♗f6 21.♗d3 ♘f4 22.♖d1 g5 23.a4 ♗xc3 24.bxc3 bxa4. During the game I thought that Black was much better here, an impression that is confirmed by the engines. White managed to hold against his much lower-rated opponent, but it wasn't comfortable: 25.♖g1 h6 26.♗xa6 ♔g7 27.♔b2 ♖d2 28.h4 a3+ 29.♔xa3 ♖a8 30.♖b6 ♘e2 31.♖g2 ♖xc2 32.hxg5 hxg5 33.♖xg5+ ♔f6 34.♖f5+ ♔g7 35.♖g5+ ♔f6 36.♖f5+ ♔g7 37.♖g5+ ½-½ Ortiz Suarez (2625)-Homa (2367).

17...♕xb7 18.♖xb7 ♗f6 19.a4 ♗xc3 20.bxc3 bxa4 21.♗xa6 g5 22.♗b5



Andriasyan says that his initial reaction was that 'White should have a large advantage because of his bishop and passed pawns, plus the fact that the black king is cut off'. Funny how two players can have such a different gut feeling about the position! I thought at once that this could turn out pretty disgusting for White – king's rook on c8, knight round to e5: I just couldn't imagine White being better here.

22...♘f4

After 22...♔g7 23.♖d1 ♖hb8 24.♖xb8 ♖xb8 25.c4 ♘f4 26.♔b2 Andriasyan makes the point that although the computer considers the position equal, 'such positions are extremely difficult to play for Black, especially when a pair of rooks has been exchanged'. I think that this is a very important point. With both pairs of rooks on the board, Black makes it much more difficult for the white king to advance in support of the passed c-pawn. For this reason I liked the manoeuvre that Chandra played very much. Ter Sahakyan-J.Polgar continued: 26...♘g6 27.♔a3 ♘e5 28.♔xa4 ♘xf3 29.c5 ♘e5 30.c6 ♖c8 31.♖d6 ♔f6 32.♔b4 g4 33.♔c5 ♔e7 34.♖d1 h5 35.♔b6 ♖b8+ 36.♔c5 ♖c8 37.♔b6 ♖b8+ 38.♔a6 ♘xc6 39.♗xc6 ♖b2 40.♗a4 ♖b4 41.♗b5 ♖xe4 42.♖c1 h4 43.c4 ♖e2 44.c5 ♖xh2 45.c6 ♖d2 46.c7 ♖d8 47.cxd8♕+ ♔xd8 48.♗e2 f5 49.♖c4 ♔d7 50.♗xg4 fxg4 51.♖xg4 ♔c6 52.♔a5 ♔d5 1-0.

23.c4 Following Andriasyan's recommendation. **23...♘g6** Bringing the knight to e5, which covers the f7-square and thus prevents White from forcing an exchange of rooks by threatening to invade on the 7th. Black can also simply try and take the pawn on f3 and then push his kingside pawns, being willing to sacrifice the exchange or even a rook for the c-pawn. The knight on f3 is ideally-placed to shepherd home Black's kingside pawns.

23...♘e2 was the only move considered by Andriasyan, when after 24.c5 ♘c3+ 25.♔b2 ♘xb5 26.♖xb5 'White is better but rook endings are notorious for their drawing tendencies'.

24.♖f1 And White offered a draw in Quesada-Chandra, Philadelphia 2015.

24.c5 ♘e5 25.♖f1 ♖c8 was what I thought during the game, which indeed just seems fine for Black.

I'm not allowed to give half stars so it will have to be a miserly 3! A good solid opening book which would be very useful for anyone wanting to take up the English Attack against the Paulsen. The line is very popular though, and evolving rapidly, so if you want to take it up with this book, buy it quickly! ■

Jan Timman

Two Americans

Fabiano Caruana and Hikaru Nakamura will play in the 2016 Candidates' tournament. In the fourth and final leg of the FIDE Grand Prix in Khanty-Mansiysk, they secured first and second place in the overall GP standings. Thanks to Caruana's switchback from Italy to his native country, the United States will have (at least) two candidates that will vie for the right to challenge Magnus Carlsen.

Over a quarter of a century ago, the then chess players' union the GMA organized a series of tournaments under the collective name of World Cup. In six prominent locations in Western and Northern Europe, the entire world top came together to contest the highest honour. Kasparov and Karpov also participated. This was an exceptional gesture on the part of the two Ks, since they didn't get any special treatment. They were used to getting large appearance fees. Solidarity was more than just a pretty word in those days; the top players also lived up to it. A pool of players played four out of the six tournaments, with the best three being counted for the final standings: everyone had the right to have a bad tournament.

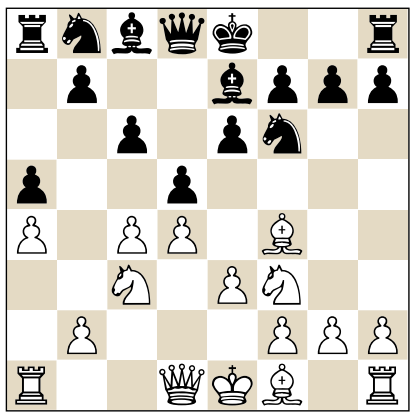
The present Grand Prix cycle organized by FIDE enjoys far less prestige. The tournaments of the last cycle were spread over four locations, all of them in the former Soviet Union, undoubtedly as a result of the re-election of Ilyumzhinov. With Kasparov in charge, they would probably have broken through to the West. The planning was not always up to scratch. Caruana complained with reason about the fact that the Khanty-Mansiysk tournament took place on the heels of the event in Tashkent. The biggest problem with the Grand Prix is that four top players have long stopped attending: Carlsen, Anand, Kramnik and Aronian. This time, Topalov was also absent, so that only half the Top 10 participated. This being the case, you'd wonder if the series should still be called the Grand Prix.

But all the tournaments in the series were worthwhile, especially that in Khanty-Mansiysk. Two places in the Candidates' tournament were at stake. The pool of players was divided in such a way that each of them missed one event, and the result of the other three counted for the final standings. Coincidence would have it that only the players playing in Khanty-Mansyisk were in a position to qualify. Tomashevsky had the best chances with 252 points, mainly because of his unshared victory in Tbilisi. Caruana had 230 points and Nakamura 207. Other players, e.g. Gelfand and Jakovenko, were lagging by 30+ points, which meant that their only chance was a clear victory in Khanty-Mansiysk.

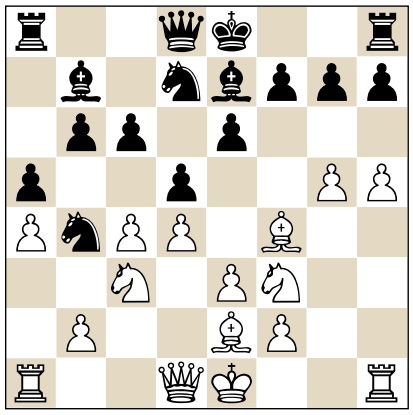
Tomashevsky won his Round 1 game from a losing position against Jobava and completely outplayed Grischuk in Round 2. After move 38 he had several ways to launch a mating attack. While Tomashevsky was thinking about his 39th move, he was shocked to see that he had only four seconds left. There being no increments, he had to move at once. He played two howlers. After the time-control he still had a winning endgame, but his technique let him down. This was not such a catastrophe in itself. Tomashevsky hadn't lost a single game in the series so far, and if he continued to play solidly, he would certainly qualify. The problem was that he was to face an unleashed Caruana in Round 3.

SL 3.1 – D15
Fabiano Caruana
Evgeny Tomashevsky
Khanty-Mansiysk 2015 (3)

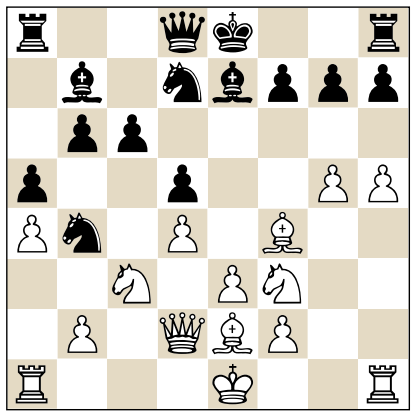
1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 a6 5.a4 e6 6.♗f4 a5 7.e3 ♗e7



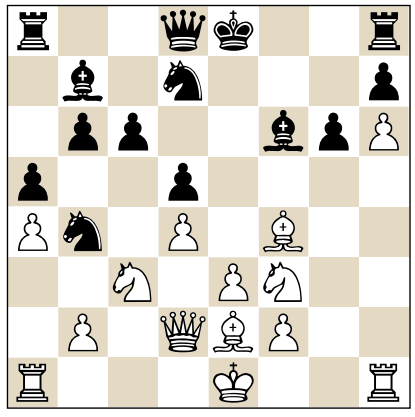
8.g4!
A well-known idea in the Slav and the Queen's Gambit, but new in this position. White usually develops his bishop modestly to e2. After the game Tomashevky said: 'Such an aggressive idea came as quite a surprise to me.'
In actual practice, the player confronted with the novelty faces a difficult job, being forced at an early stage to find his or her way through potential complications that his opponent is already familiar with.
8...♘a6 9.g5 ♘d7 10.h4 ♘b4 11.♗e2 b6 12.h5 ♗b7



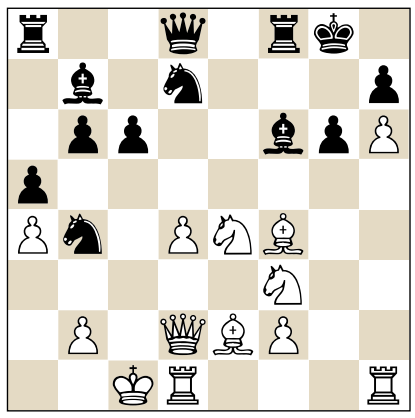
13.cxd5 The correct moment to release the central tension. If White goes 13.♕d2 first, he will have to reckon with 13...c5.
13...exd5
The best way to recapture. Black wants to maintain the strong position of his knight.
14.♕d2
In preparation of queenside castling.

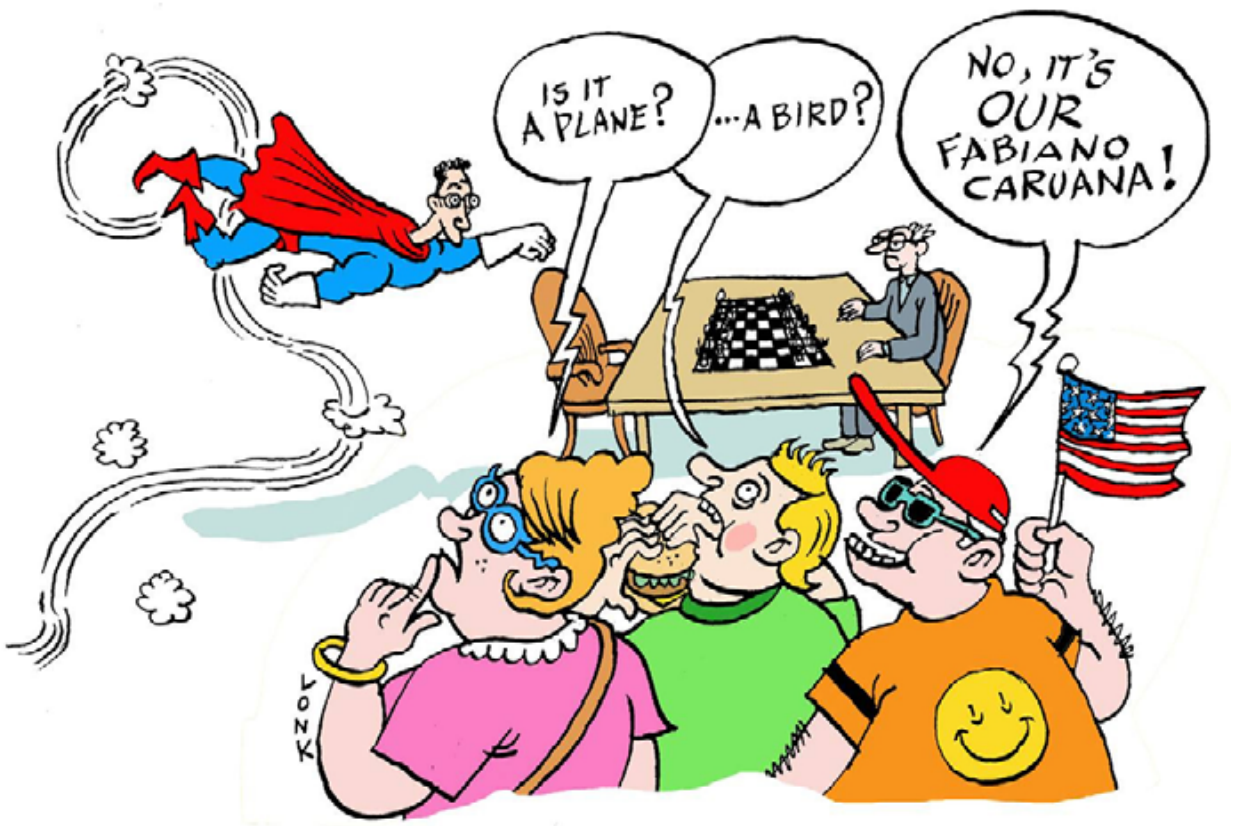


14...f5 It was anything but easy for Black to find a good plan. After 14...0-0 15.0-0-0 White would have the strong threat of 16.g6. His attack looks promising.
14...f6 was probably more accurate than the text, since it would have forced White to show his hand: should he swap on f6 or cover the g-pawn? The capture would make no difference to the game. After 15.♖g1 Black can play 15...♘f8!, and the knight is on its way to e6.
15.gxf6
Caruana would probably also have played this after 14...f6. The ensuing half-open type of position suits him. Caruana is very strong in the struggle for the initiative. Objectively speaking, however, not capturing would have yielded better chances of an advantage, since Black would find it hard to create counterplay.
15...♗xf6 16.h6 g6



17.e4 White could also have castled queenside at once, as his e-pawn would still be able to advance after 17.0-0-0 ♕e7: 18.e4! dxe4 19.♖he1!, and White recaptures the pawn with a large advantage. In that case, too, the knight move 17...♘f8! would have been Black's best bet. After 18.e4 ♘e6 he would have sufficient counterplay in the centre.
17...dxe4
An obvious move, but not the strongest one. Black needn't have feared the further advance of the white e-pawn and could safely have continued 17...0-0!, when he would control the position after 18.e5 ♗e7 19.♗e3 ♖f5!. White could also have solved the central tension with 18.exd5, but then the beautiful pawn sac 18...c5! would have given Black sufficient counterplay.
18.♘xe4 0-0 19.0-0-0





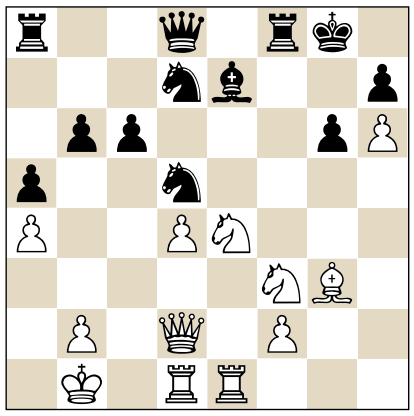
Now White is better, although the dominant position of the black knight on b4 is still a problem.

19...♘d5 Interesting was 19...c5, intending to meet 20.♗c4+ ♔h8 21.d5 with the pawn sac 21...b5. But Black's counterplay would be insufficient after 22.axb5 a4 23.♗g5 a3 24.♔b1!, and White keeps control.

20.♗g3 ♗a6

Now White will get a large advantage. Regrouping with 20...♗e7, intending to take the queen's knight to f6 and redeploying the queen's bishop via c8, would have yielded Black better chances.

21.♗xa6 ♖xa6 22.♖he1 ♖a8 23.♔b1 ♗e7



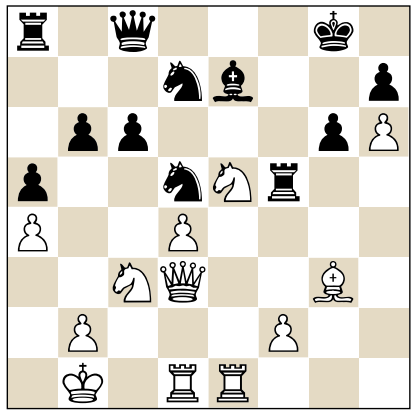
24.♕d3!

Caruana consistently finds the best squares for his pieces.

24...♖f5 25.♘e5

Confronting Black with a dilemma: if he swaps the knight, White will get a strong passed pawn. If he covers the c-pawn, he will be forced on the defensive even more. And 25...♖c8 runs into the devastating 26.♘c4.

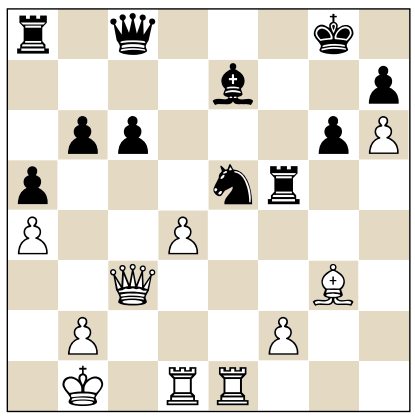
25...♕c8 26.♘c3



26...♘xc3+

After this swap Black completely loses control. More tenacious was 26...♘xe5 27.dxe5 ♕e6. White will win a pawn, but the endgame still requires solid technique.

27.♕xc3 ♘xe5

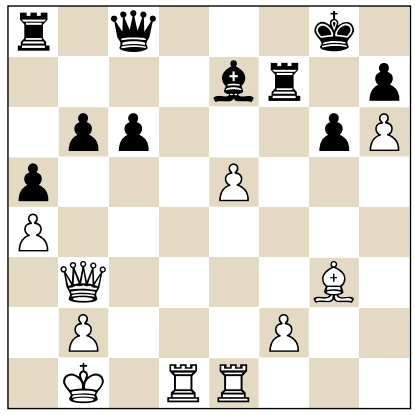


28.♕b3+

With this intermediate check White guarantees free passage for the passed e-pawn he will get.

The immediate 28.dxe5 would also have won, since 28...♕e6 would fail to 29.♖d6!, and after 29...♗xd6 30.exd6 ♕f6 31.♕xc6 ♖f8 32.♖e7 Black would be defenceless.

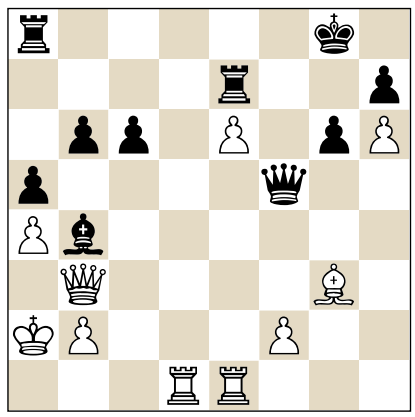
28...♖f7 29.dxe5



29...♕f5+

With 29...♕g4 Black could still have sown some confusion. A nice variation is: 30.e6 ♖f3 31.♕xb6 ♕f5+ 32.♔a1 ♖a3+ 33.bxa3 ♗f6+ 34.♗e5 ♗xe5 35.♖xe5 ♕xe5+ 36.♕d4, and White will win the rook ending.

30.♔a2 ♗b4 31.e6 ♖e7



32.♗h4! A deadly zwischenzug. The road for the e-pawn is clear. **32...♖ee8 33.e7+ ♕f7 34.♖e6 b5 35.♖d8** Caruana is playing consistently for promotion. He could also have won on the kingside: after 35.♖g1 Black will be unable to prevent the capture on g6. **35...bxa4 36.♕e3 ♗xe7 37.♖xa8 ♖xa8 38.♗xe7 ♖e8 39.♔a1 a3 40.bxa3 ♕f5 41.♕c3** Black resigned.

MARIA EMELIANOVA

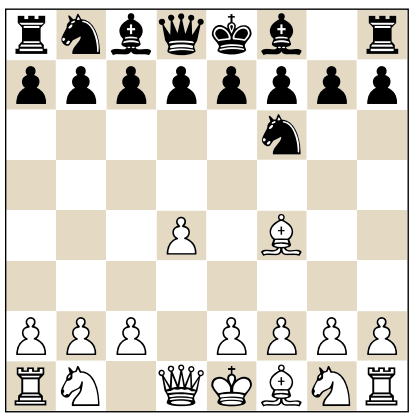
No more worries about the Candidates' tournament. It's in the bag! Fabiano Caruana clearly played the best chess in Khanty-Mansiysk.

With this victory Caruana very clearly staked his claim for one of the qualification spots. He also won in Rounds 4 and 6, which brought qualification within reach. Caruana clearly played the best chess in Khanty-Mansiysk.

Halfway the tournament it was by no means clear that the other American player would also qualify. Nakamura drew his first six games. He took few risks and his play lacked vigour. His first win came in the seventh round, when he beat the unfortunate Vachier-Lagrave, inflicting that player's fourth defeat in a row.

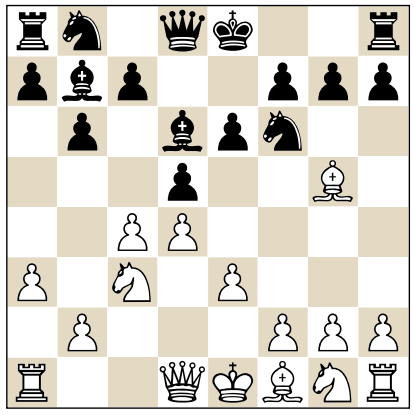
QP 7.2 – A45
Hikaru Nakamura
Maxime Vachier-Lagrave
Khanty-Mansiysk 2015 (7)

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♗f4



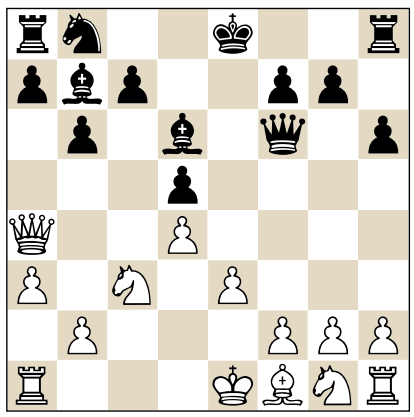
'I just wanted to play a game', Nakamura said afterwards. This non-theoretical approach against a player struggling with his form turned out to be a great success.

2...b6 3.c4 ♗b7 4.♘c3 e6 5.a3 d5 6.e3 ♗d6 7.♗g5



7...h6 This move gets Black into trouble. There was nothing against 7...dxc4, followed by 8...0-0.

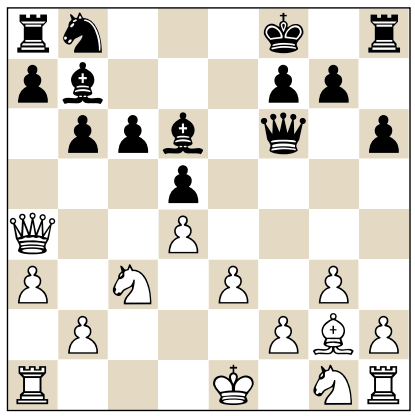
8.♗xf6 ♕xf6 9.cxd5 exd5 10.♕a4+



This is Black's problem. After 10...♗c6 11.♕c2 his pieces are misplaced.

10...♔f8 11.g3 The fianchetto is effective in these circumstances.

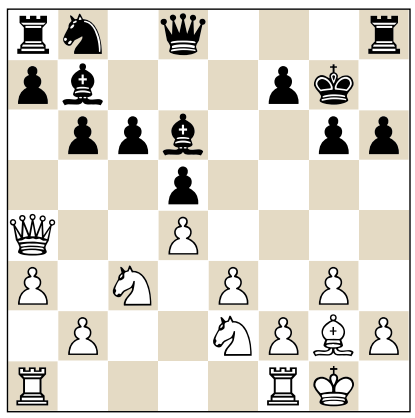
11...c6 12.♗g2



12...g6

Afterwards the players agreed that 12...♕e7, intending to take the knight to f6 as quickly as possible, would have been better, although White would still have had a plus. After 13.♘ge2 ♘d7 he must not thoughtlessly continue with 14.0-0, since this would allow Black to get what he wants with 14...♘f6, and the advance of the white e-pawn has been prevented for the moment. But a strong move was the immediate 14.e4!, with the point that White can safely meet 14...dxe4 15.♘xe4 c5 with 16.0-0. The e4-knight is hanging, but this is of no consequence, since White is attacking the queen on d7.

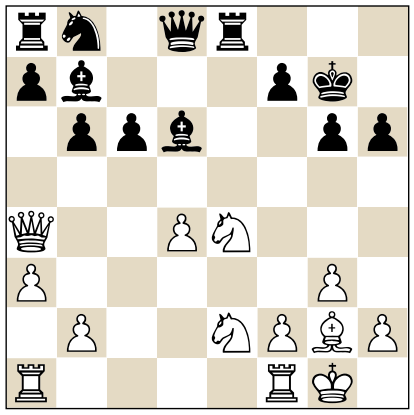
13.♘ge2 ♔g7 14.0-0 ♕d8



15.e4

Of course. The situation is clearly better for White than in the Tartakower Variation, since White has a big lead in development.

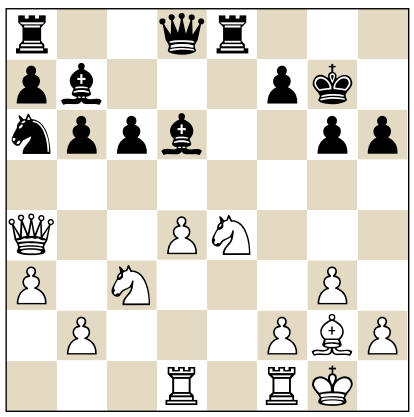
15...dxe4 16.♘xe4 ♖e8



17.♖ad1

Afterwards Nakamura expressed his dissatisfaction with this move, saying that White should have played his rooks to c1 and d1. This is the age-old problem of which squares to develop your rooks to. I think that the text was White's best bet. If he wants to, he can put the king's rook on the e-file.

17...♘a6 18.♘2c3



18...♘c7

Black arms himself against the advance of the d-pawn, but in doing so allows White to deal a strategic hammer blow.

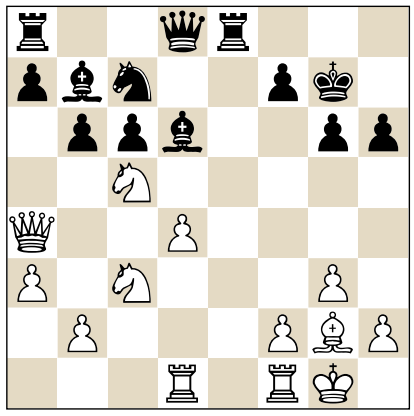
Khanty-Mansiysk 2015				cat. XXI
				TPR
1 Dmitry Jakovenko	RUS	2738	6½	2821
2 Fabiano Caruana	ITA	2803	6½	2815
3 Hikaru Nakamura	USA	2799	6½	2816
4 Leinier Dominguez	CUB	2734	6	2793
5 Boris Gelfand	ISR	2744	6	2792
6 Alexander Grischuk	RUS	2780	5½	2753
7 Peter Svidler	RUS	2734	5½	2757
8 Anish Giri	NED	2776	5½	2753
9 Sergey Karjakin	RUS	2753	5½	2755
10 Evgeny Tomashevsky	RUS	2749	5	2719
11 Baadur Jobava	GEO	2699	4	2658
12 Maxime Vachier-Lagrave	FRA	2754	3½	2622

MARIA EMELIANOVA

'I just wanted to play a game.' And it worked! Hikaru Nakamura made sure that all Americans in the Grand Prix qualified for the Candidates' tournament.

It was not easy to find useful alternatives. After 18...♗e7 19.d5 cxd5 20.♘xd5 ♗xd5 21.♕xa6 ♖c8 22.♗h3! Black is in big trouble. The only move that would keep him afloat is 18...♖b8, after which White can calmly reinforce his position with 19.h4.

19.♘c5!



Very elegant. Black cannot prevent his pawn structure from being shattered.

19...bxc5 20.dxc5 ♘d5 21.cxd6 ♕xd6 22.♘e4

On its way to the vital square c5.

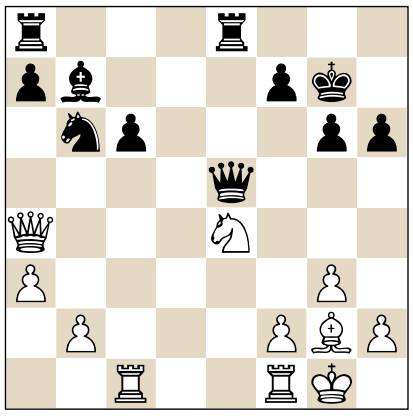
22...♕e5 23.♖c1

A quiet positional move. White is moving to the queenside, where his opponent has been seriously weakened. An alternative was the sharp 23.f4 in order to open a second front on the kingside, e.g. 23...♕e7 24.♕d4+ ♔g8 25.f5, with good attacking chances.

23...♘b6

This utterly fails to solve Black's problems. He should have left his knight in its central position.

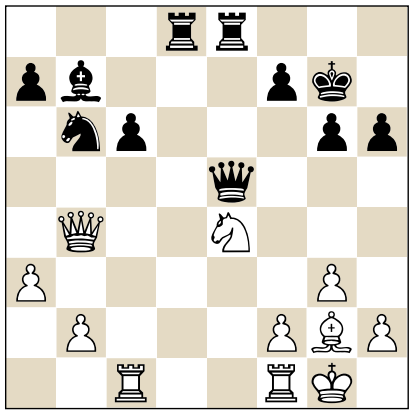
Black's best chance was 23...a5 in order to continue to play as actively as possible.



24.♕b4! Now the knight is also threatening to jump to d6.

24...♖ad8

The fact that this natural developing move could have led to an immediate defeat demonstrates how bad Black's position is. However bad it looks, 24...♖ab8 was Black's only option.



25.♘c5 Nakamura played this quickly, and no more was said about it during the press conference. But White had a far stronger move here, viz. 25.♖ce1!. Vachier-Lagrave would undoubtedly have met this with 25...♖d4, but then White wins an exchange with 26.♘d6!. This makes this quiet rook move so strong: White keeps his options of playing his knight to c5 or d6 open.

25...♖d4? A terrible mistake in a bad position. Black should have settled for the passive 25...♗a8, after which he would last for another while.

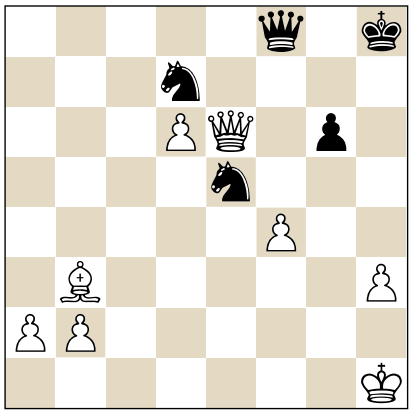
26.♕c3 With the double threat of 27.♘xb7 and 27.♖ce1.

26...♗c8 After 26...♘a4 27.♘xa4 ♖xa4 28.♕b3! White would win a piece.

27.♖ce1 Certainly not 27.♖fe1? ♖c4!, and Black escapes.

Now Black will lose handfuls of material. Black resigned.

In Round 8, Caruana unexpectedly lost to Jakovenko, which threw the fight for first place wide open again. Nakamura won a curious game against Jobava and drew level. Dominguez also had five points, but his chances of qualifying were nil. Gelfand and Jakovenko, half a point behind, were still in the running. With a strong final spurt they might be able to create chances. In Round 9 they played one another in a highly charged encounter. Gelfand avoided a draw by repetition early on in the middlegame and then found himself in a losing position. But he squared his shoulders and managed to reach the following position:



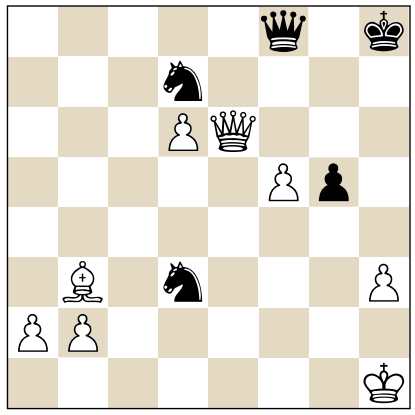
Jakovenko-Gelfand
Khanty-Mansiysk 2015 (9)
position after 44.♗b3

Both players are hampered in their movements. The black queen is tied to f8, while White cannot capture on e5 in view of perpetual check. This makes Black's next move strong.

44...g5!

Forcing the f-pawn to f5, after which his knight is no longer under attack.

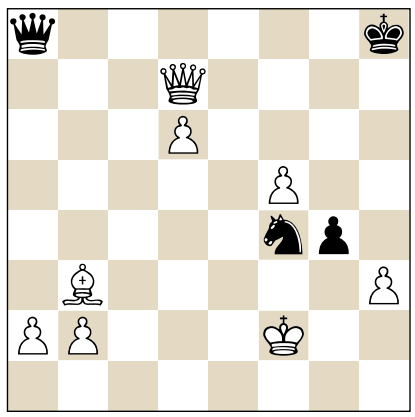
45.f5 ♘d3 Desperation or miscalculation? I think it was the latter. Gelfand had plenty time on his clock, and he must have seen that he would be unable to build a reasonably solid defensive line with 45...♔g7, with a long defensive slog ahead. It is tempting in such a case to go for a combination that seems to solve all problems in one fell swoop. The problem is that it had a gaping hole.



46.♕xd7 Jakovenko didn't have much time left, but enough to see that he could just take the offered knight.

46...♕a8+ 47.♔g1 ♘f4 Things aren't looking too bad for Black, but White has a sobering reply.

48.♔f2 The king will be able to escape via d4. Gelfand decides to change tack. **48...g4** A last-ditch attempt. Black is aiming for stalemate.



MARIA EMELIANOVA

Dmitry Jakovenko and Boris Gelfand at the press conference. Guess who botched up a totally winning position and who escaped with a miraculous stalemate?

Jan Timman

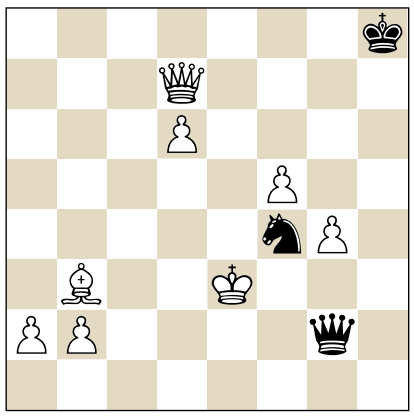
FIDE Grand Prix 2014-15

Final standings after 4 legs				1	2	3	4	Total
1	**Fabiano Caruana**	ITA	2803	155	75		140	**370**
2	**Hikaru Nakamura**	USA	2799	82	125		140	**347**
3	**Dmitry Jakovenko**	RUS	2738		30	140	140	**310**
4	**Evgeny Tomashevsky**	RUS	2749	82		170	30	**282**
5	**Boris Gelfand**	ISR	2744	155	15		85	**255**
6	**Shakhriyar Mamedyarov**	AZE	2735	35	125	75		**235**
7	**Sergey Karjakin**	RUS	2753	82	75		55	**212**
8	**Teimour Radjabov**	AZE	2738	50	50	110		**210**
9	**Dmitry Andreikin**	RUS	2723	20	170	10		**200**
10	**Alexander Grischuk**	RUS	2810	82		40	55	**177**
11	**Leinier Dominguez**	CUB	2734	10		75	85	**170**
12	**Anish Giri**	NED	2776		40	75	55	**170**
13	**Peter Svidler**	RUS	2734	82		20	55	**157**
14	**Baadur Jobava**	GEO	2699		75	40	20	**135**
15	**Rustam Kasimdzhanov**	UZB	2715	35	15	75		**125**
16	**Maxime Vachier-Lagrave**	FRA	2754		75	40	10	**125**

1=Baku, 2=Tashkent, 3=Tbilisi, 4=Khanty-Mansiysk

49.hxg4? And Jakovenko falls for it! He had no fewer than five moves that would lead to a win. Here they are, in order of strength: 49.♔g3, 49.♔e3, 49.♕b5, 49.♗d1 and even 49.♗d5. The relevant variations are not difficult.

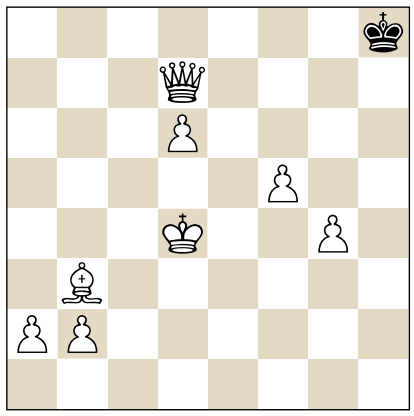
49...♕g2+ 50.♔e3



50...♘d5+!

It is unclear whether Jakovenko had not seen the stalemate coming at all or whether he was confident that Black would fail to sacrifice both pieces. The knight check is Black's only salvation. It takes so many squares away from the enemy king that it has to be captured.

51.♔d4 ♕f2+ 52.♔xd5 ♕d4+ 53.♔xd4



And he decides to take the queen as well. It is stalemate.

Jakovenko later still created chances for himself by beating Karjakin in the penultimate round. In the final round, he was Black against Nakamura. It was a quiet game that ended in a draw. 'I wasn't sure if he would play solidly or try something crazy to create an imbalance,' Nakamura said afterwards. Jakovenko explained why he had gone for the first option: a defeat would have left him with empty hands, whereas a draw would still yield him some chances: if either Caruana or Nakamura wins the World Cup, which will take place later this year, he will get a spot in the Candidates' tournament after all. This feels like a loose end in the qualification system. Caruana and Nakamura should compete in the World Cup *hors concours,* and in case of 'double' qualification the reserves should come from the World Cup.

What is going to happen now? FIDE has announced that the Candidates' tournament will take place in the United States. This sounds logical enough, with at least two American Candidates (Wesley So may yet join them), but Nakamura was quite pessimistic about the idea, estimating its chances of success at 'maybe 5 per cent'. There was no interest in St. Louis anyway. Here, too, the prospects would have been brighter if Kasparov had become President of FIDE. ■

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– Uwe Bekemann, Deutscher Fernschachbund

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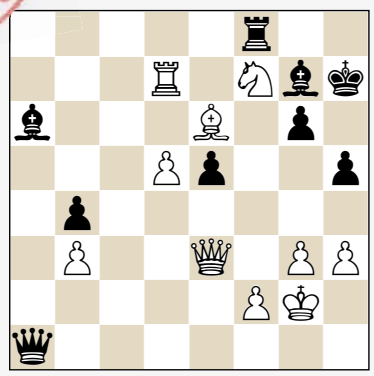
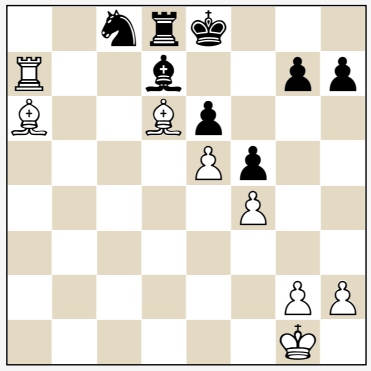


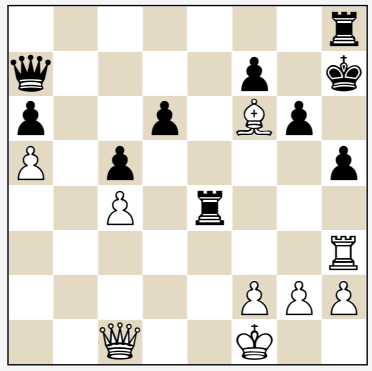
1. Gao Rui-Shen
Reykjavik 2015

64.♕h6+! With checkmate after 64...♗xh6 65.♘g5+ ♔h8 66.♖h7 mate.



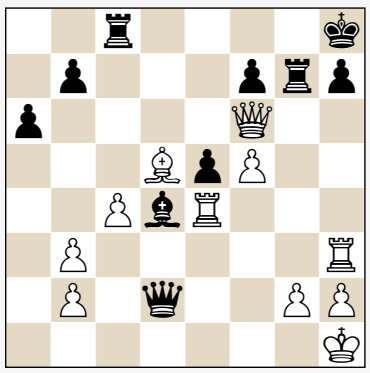
2. Paragua-Sadorra
Manila 2013

32.♖xd7! ♔**xd7** Indeed, there's no point in suffering after 32...♖xd7 33.♗xc8. **33.♗b5** Mate.



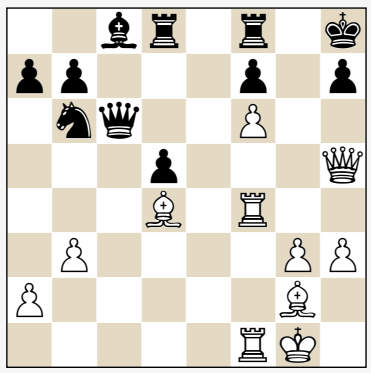
3. Bulski-Berezjuk
Slovakia 2015

35.♖xh5+! gxh5 36.♕g5 Black resigned.



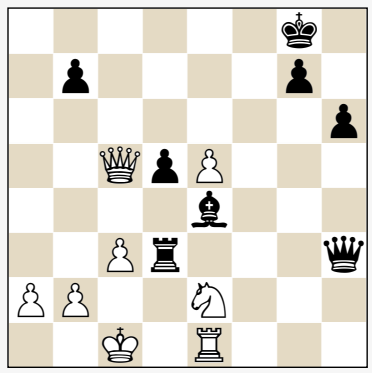
4. Van Kampen-Carlsson
Reykjavik 2015

28.♖xh7+! Otherwise it is White's king who bites the dust. **28...♔xh7 29.♖h4+ ♔g8 30.♗xf7+!** Black resigned: 30...♖xf7 31.♖h8 mate.



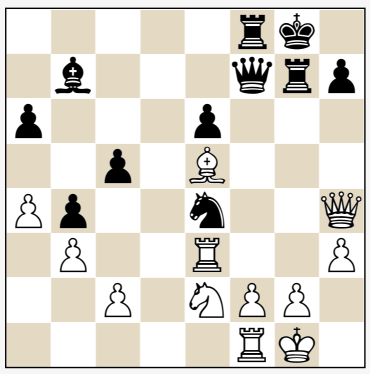
5. Pogonina-Sherif
Chengdu 2015

27.♗e4! Black resigned as after 27...dxe4 28.♖h4 she is checkmated. Far less convincing was 27.♖h4 ♕c2 28.♗e4 ♕xe4 29.♖xe4 dxe4.



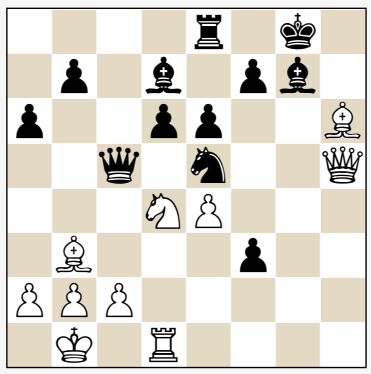
6. Hauge-A.Rombaldoni
Reykjavik 2015

31...♖d2! With the idea 32.♔xd2 ♕d3+ 33.♔c1 ♕c2 mate. **32.♕c8+!?** Either a blunder or a last insidious trick. **32...♕xc8** White resigned.



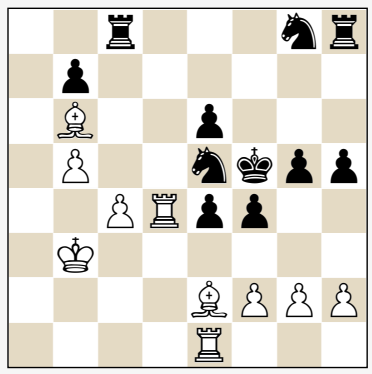
7. Neuman-Kuipers
Pardubice 2013

27...♖xg2+! 28.♔xg2 Now Black should refrain from the premature discovered check: **28...♕g6+** White resigned in view of 29.♔h2 (29.♕g4 ♘xf2+) 29...♘d2! 30.♖g3 (the most beautiful line is 30.♖g1 ♘f1+! 31.♖xf1 ♕g2 mate) 30...♘xf1+ 31.♔g1 ♘xg3 32.♘xg3 ♕xc2.



8. Mchedlishvili-Javakhadze
Nakhchivan 2013

The defensive resource …♘g6 saves Black in the event of ♖g1 or ♖h1. **24.♘f5!** ♗**xh6** 24...exf5 loses to 25.♕g5 ♘g6 26.♕xg6; if 24...♗f6 then 25.♗e3, and wins. **25.♕xh6 exf5 26.♖h1** Black resigned. Note that 24.♖h1 ♘g6 25.♘f5 ♗xh6 26.♕xh6 ♕e5! wouldn't do.



9. A.Zhigalko-Vaibhav
Lille 2013

35.♖xe4! ♘**f6** The black king is neatly wrapped after 35...♔xe4 36.♗g4+ ♔d3 37.♖d1+ ♔e4 38.♖d4 mate. **36.♖xe5+! ♔xe5 37.♗g4+ ♔d6** 37...♘e4 38.♗f3. **38.♖xe6+ ♔d7 39.♗f5!** This quiet move decides the game. Black resigned.

Visualize your move before you make it

Writing down a move before you make it, is no longer allowed by the rules of chess. Still, **Parimarjan Negi** has come to realize that making a move in your mind and then thinking again before you actually execute it, makes a lot of sense.

It has been an eventful time for chess spectators. A week before Nigel Short's New In Chess column on women went 'viral', St. Louis saw the U.S. championship being decided in probably one of the most dramatic 5 move games in the history of the championship. 'Double check, triple check, use your time' were the notes Wesley So wrote to himself before his game with Varuzhan Akobian. It can be surprising and, for some people, reassuring, to see that even the very best struggle with such problems. After all, we often lose games not because of the things we don't understand, but things we know very well. If only we had had a little more time, if only we had thought a minute more at that crucial point…

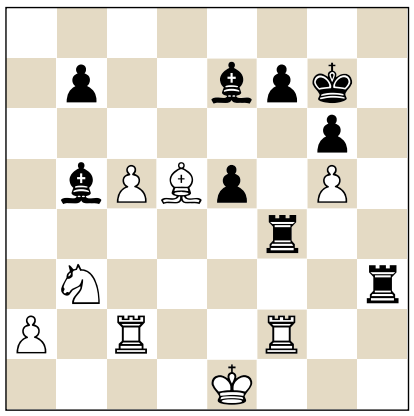
How to avoid these 'unforced errors' is a perpetual struggle for every chess player. In today's chess you shouldn't follow Wesley's method as it's against one of the many arbitrary FIDE rules. Apparently some people think what he did is very 'disturbing' or can be equated with 'cheating'. I wonder if I can start claiming wins against people who box the 40th move on their score-sheets?

There is no fixed formula you can implement to avoid such mistakes, as the ones Wesley tried to avoid. But that doesn't mean we can't reduce them. I have talked before about trying to decide when it's worth calculating or not – which is a useful analytical method, but it's not quite possible to always be on your toes and look for motifs of course.

Every player has a different way to become more vigilant – but the Wesley So incident reminded me of an old nemesis: the now-banned *write before you move* system that a lot of kids (including me) were taught, based on old Soviet ideologues. I remember thinking that it was pointless, cumbersome, and I often blatantly ignored my coach's advice to follow the method. Therefore, when FIDE cracked down on the system, I didn't particularly notice it, although quite a few strong players of the older generation struggled to discard their ingrained habits. Much, much later, after many impulsive blunders, I began to see a logic behind this outdated system.

How often have you played a move, and then immediately wished to take it back? It's a curious tendency, but I have noticed that often it's right after playing a move that you see everything clearly: either a tactical idea you overlooked, or just a simple realization that the move you made doesn't really help your plan at all. It's usually followed by a lot of brooding, and inevitably, worse moves later…

A couple of extreme examples from my games demonstrate this. The following game was played on one of the top boards in the penultimate round:



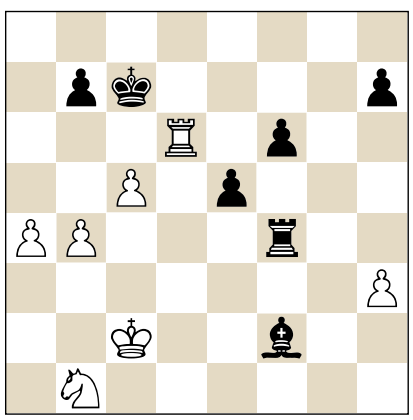
Sandipan-Negi
Dubai 2012

Black has a fair amount of good moves, and I already considered the game to be over:

40...♖h1+?? 41.♗xh1

And indeed the game did not last too long, as I had expected.

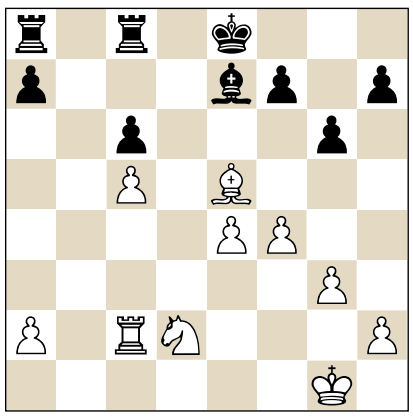
There's not a lot to say about this game – particularly since I wasn't even in time pressure. One could of course write it off as an absolute probabilistic fluke, but a few months later, I experienced an eerie repetition in the 8th round of the Baku Open, when fighting for the lead again:



Zhigalko-Negi
Baku 2012

Black has decent winning chances – and after ...♖xb4, ...♗xc5, I could torture the leader for a long time. Instead, I tried for an even bigger advantage with: **34...b6?? 35.♖xb6** and ironically, not only do I lose the pawn, but the rook also defends the b4-pawn.

I'd like to point out that the technique of writing down your move before executing it isn't just useful if you're prone to one move blunders – although it's particularly useful then. More often than not, it's the small inaccuracies, or even just the annoyance of missing your opponent's moves, that leads us into a downward spiral because right after you make a move, you realize you could've done something better:



Bai-Negi
Manila 2013

> 'All you do is imagine playing the move – and then give it one final thought.'

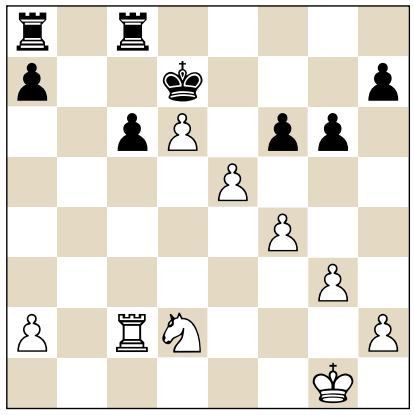
I am of course close to winning, but I still might require a couple of accurate moves.

32...f6

Wait, what do I plan after 33.♗d6 ? My impulsive 32...f6 doesn't quite seem like a mistake – because I still am probably winning – but I could have just played 32...♖d8, and so missing 33.♗d6 had far-reaching consequences in my mind:

33.♗d6 Of course he played that.

33...♗xd6 34.cxd6 ♔d7 35.e5



35...♖ab8?

Not quite sure what my idea was, but I realized that I forgot about ♘b3-c5 almost immediately as well: 35...♖e8 36.♖c5 is suddenly annoying. Instead, 35... c5 is probably still close to winning, but the idea of missing White's resources just sent me into an annoyed, downward spiral:

36.♘b3!

Whoa. Threatening ♘c5+. Suddenly things are actually complicated. Of course I wasn't ready for it:

36...fxe5 37.fxe5 ♔e6 38.♖c5 a6 39.♖a5 ♖b5 40.♘d4+ ♔d5 41.d7! ♖b8 42.e6

And White was almost winning!

I managed to hold a draw in the end, but the turnaround was shocking. Instead of five different mistakes, in my mind, it just felt like one drawn out mistake – as I continued to play impulsively without breaking the flow.

Even though I present these examples from a fairly recent stage in my career, this kind of situation has plagued me, and most improving players, for a long time. And it's much more apparent in the early stages of your development – when games are often decided by arbitrary blunders, or obvious mistakes *that you knew, if only you had thought a bit more.*

The idea behind the old system is that when you write down your move, you're forced to control your impulsivity and think about it. And in a sense you have a chance to literally 'take it back' if you have a flash of insight. Of course it's this habit – writing moves, and then realizing it's wrong, and playing something else, that annoyed many opponents. Certainly don't try it unless you want to really provoke your opponent!

Instead, something that helped me considerably curb down on these unwanted errors was just taking a moment and visualizing the move, instead of writing it down. Visualizing the board perfectly is a whole new topic, but here all you do is imagine playing the move – and then give it one final thought – wait for any sudden feeling of discontent, or new idea, and if all seems fine, go ahead and play it. Closed eyes, open eyes. Imagine a 2D ChessBase screen, or the real board. I don't think it matters too much. I even like changing between different modes just to avoid the monotony! As you imagine the move being made, just grasp at your instinctual thoughts – how it feels to you – are you sure you want to play it? Does it blunder something?

Of course, this doesn't guarantee anything. Of course, most of the time you wouldn't change your mind. But, at least in classical games, when you've got ages on your clock, isn't it worth

trying out if it can improve even one – two critical moves? It also adds a nice controlled rhythm to the way you play your moves – avoiding those excited, impulsive phases when blunders happen most often.

I have to admit the process seems daunting and cumbersome at first – I certainly can't imagine doing it before every move. To be honest, I'm not even very good at this – and I still continue to make easily avoidable lapses because I'm too lazy to implement this properly. But at least I try to hold back and use it in 'critical' moments – which already makes it much better than before. Again, there's no fixed definition – but there are few good indicators:

1) Are you feeling impulsive – ready to win this game already and go home?

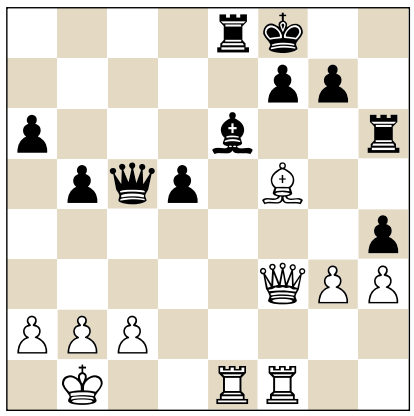
2) Are you confused between the different choices?

3) Are there a lot of moves possible – in particular, are there a lot of tactical motifs around?

The list can go on, but I hope you get the general idea. Just thinking a little bit extra about your decisions can really have dramatic effects.

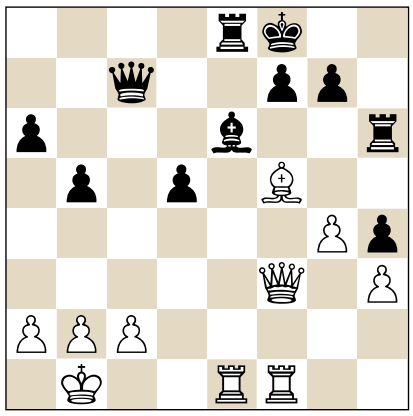
It's harder to see the dramatically positive effects of this strategy, because it usually helps me *avoid* making such dramatic mistakes like before. You almost don't notice the blunders *you don't make,* because you just take that to be the normal case. But it helps. In a recent game, I almost blundered a piece against a kid right out of the opening – stopping myself at the last moment. Another time, after 8 hours of brutal American chess, I almost missed a primitive knight fork but noticed it right in time.

These examples aren't particularly exciting. But sometimes, the last-minute differences are much less direct and their effects might not seem apparent unless you look really closely. Maybe you just see a new idea worth trying, and that can make all the difference, like in these games:



Negi-Kovalyov
Tromsø 2014 (2)

30...♕c7
It's been an interesting, but far from accurate game. Here we were nearing time pressure, although not yet there. I would've liked to play g4 with the intention to go g5..., but I noticed his idea was probably ...♕g3, which looks annoying. So I was ready to play gxh4, when a new idea suddenly hit me:
31.g4!?



31...♕g3?? Played a little too quickly. If he had been a little less impulsive, I might have actually regretted not playing the less ambitious gxh4... 31...♖f6 would be perfectly alright for Black, but White should have enough compensation too.
32.g5! Not that hard of a tactic, but a little unexpected.
32...♕xg5 32...♕xf3 33.♖xf3+–.
33.♗xe6 ♖f6 34.♕g4
And the rest was easy.

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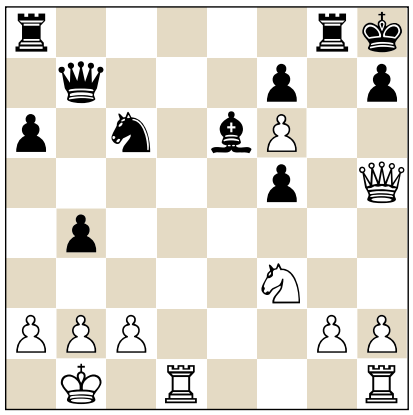
The move I played was objectively not even the best, perhaps. If I had played gxh4 without thinking, I wouldn't have noticed the moment. It's hard to say if g4 was worth it, but in the end, it did work.

Here's another, even more complicated example where it was psychologically absolutely crucial that I noticed my opponent's idea right in time, even though objectively my move wasn't that great:



Negi-Edouard
Helsingor 2014

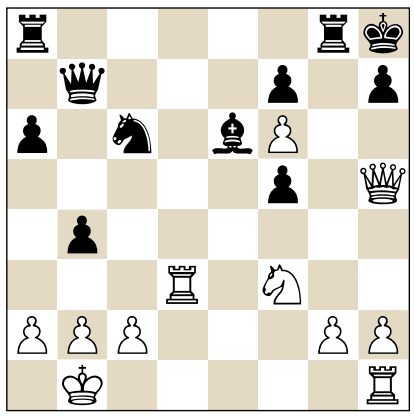
It's been an insane game so far, and we were on the verge of entering a mutual time-scramble. With naive courage I had been avoiding a repetition, resting my hopes on an appropriate h4/♘g5, but Black has started to come up with threats of his own. Here, I was about to continue with my plan of 24.h4, when I noticed, while giving it a final 'visualization', that 24...♗xa2+ completely turns the tables. After 25.♔xa2 b3+ 26.cxb3 ♖ab8, Black takes over the initiative. Of course, analysing with the computer you can find a draw there, but for a practical game, coming under an attack like that didn't seem a great idea. So instead I went:

24.♖d3

To be honest, it would have been much smarter if I had used the same reasoning to find 24.b3. But this article isn't about finding the best objective moves – the key was to avoid Black's ...♗xa2 idea, and keep the tension.

24.h4 ♗xa2+! 25.♔xa2 b3+! 26.cxb3 ♖ab8 would have been just bad for White.

> 'The most common way to lose a game is by doing something so obviously wrong, that you could avoid it by just being a little calm.'



24...♕c7?

Played a little too quickly... Romain forgot the only idea I had been dreaming about for so long was h4. 24...♗c4! was an unexpectedly cold-blooded defence that I overlooked – and the reason why 24.b3 would have been even better. There are still some complications, but Black is clearly pressing.

25.h4!

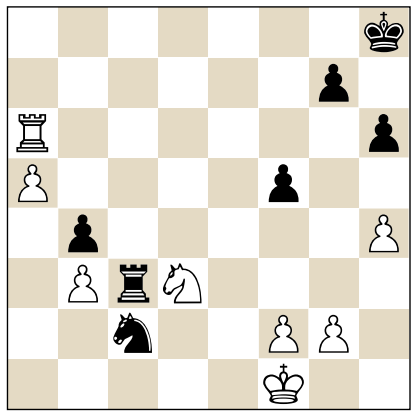
Now we continued a wild, wild game in a nerve-wracking time-scramble, but it's not particularly relevant to our topic here. Visualizing before you play a move is not a particularly good idea when you're running out of time...

25...♖g6 26.♘g5 ♗xa2+ 27.♔xa2 h6 28.♖hd1 ♘e5 29.♖d6! ♖f8 30.♔b1 ♖c8 31.♖1d2 ♔g8 32.♕d1 hxg5 33.♖d8+ ♔h7 34.♖xc8 ♕xc8 35.♖d8

And it was all over soon.

Also, don't consider visualizing your move before you make it as a chore you must do during every game! It's already very useful to spot those creeping mistakes if you start doing it sometimes and build a habit. And, of course, I still continue to make rushed mistakes despite all this wise talk.

Here is a classic recent example where I wish I had calmed myself down and not been in such a hurry:



Negi-Kasimdzhanov
Tromsø 2014 (11)

There is probably more than one way to get a winning advantage – but the most appealing idea is of course to go after the Black king – ♖a8 – knight to g6 and h5 just sets up a mate. Therefore, I instantly went **38.♘e5** and immediately realized that after **38...♖xb3 39.♖a8+ ♔h7**, 40.h5 can be met by ...♖b1-e1 and exchanging the knights. Is that endgame winning? Who knows. But if I had only chosen 38.♘f4 instead of going to g6, I wouldn't have had to worry about it so much. Clearly I need to work more on implementing my own suggestions!

The important thing is, it doesn't happen as often to me as it used to.

Conclusion

- Don't rush with your moves. The most common way to lose a game is by doing something so obviously wrong, that you could have avoided it by just being a little calm.
- Notice the critical moments – especially when you feel impulsive, confused, tired – and visualize actually making your planned move.
- Most often, you would still be happy with your planned move. But every now and then, you'll notice like a bolt, an idea you might've missed. And then the feeling of not having played that move is like being given a new lease of life.
- Don't do this in time pressure!
- And of course, do not write on the score-sheet ☺. ■

Sam Sevian

CURRENT RATING: 2578
DATE OF BIRTH: December 26, 2000
PLACE OF BIRTH: Corning, NY, USA
PLACE OF RESIDENCE: Massachusetts, USA

What is your favourite colour?
Green.

What food makes you happy?
Good BBQ.

And what drink?
7up... just kidding, it's apple juice.

Who is your favourite author?
H.P. Lovecraft.

What was the most interesting book you ever read?
Mountains of Madness by H.P. Lovecraft.

What is your all-time favourite movie?
Life of Pi.

What is your favourite TV series?
I don't really watch TV much, but whenever I get a chance, I watch *The Big Bang Theory*.

Do you have a favourite actor?
The comedy actor Will Ferrell.

And a favourite actress?
Jennifer Lawrence, she is the chick in *The Hunger Games*.

What music do you like to listen to?
I don't really listen to music much.

Do you have a favourite artist?
Honestly, I don't dig art either, but I really like M.C. Escher. His work is as beautiful as a chess composition; very geometric.

What do you see as your best result ever?
Winning the GM Invitational in St. Louis last year and becoming a GM.

What was the best game you ever played?
It's really hard for me to pick one, but probably against Zherebukh and Finegold that last year.

Who is your favourite chess player of all time?
Kasparov, for his energetic and imaginative play and his will to win. I watched him closely to see the depth of his analysis and the tree of ideas he generates at once.

Is there a chess book that had a profound influence on you?
My Great Predecessors I by Kasparov. I also highly value the works by Aagaard.

What was the most exciting chess game you ever saw?
Kramnik-Shirov, Linares 1994, 0-1. …♖e4!! is an inhuman move.

What is the best chess country in the world?
Armenia and the Netherlands. Hope it will be the U.S. soon.

What are chess players particularly good at (except for chess)?
Counting their prize-money and figuring out pairings.

Do chess players have typical shortcomings?

Do you have any superstitions concerning chess?
I normally wear the same clothing item on the day after my win.

Who or what would you like to be if you weren't yourself?
A soccer player or basketball player.

Which three people would you like to invite for dinner?
I like to eat my meals alone or in the company of close friends and relatives. ☺

What is the best piece of advice you were ever given?
'No guts, no glory'.

Is there something you'd love to learn?
Flying planes.

What is your greatest fear?
Losing loved ones.

What would you save from your house if it were on fire?
The memory stick with all my analysis.

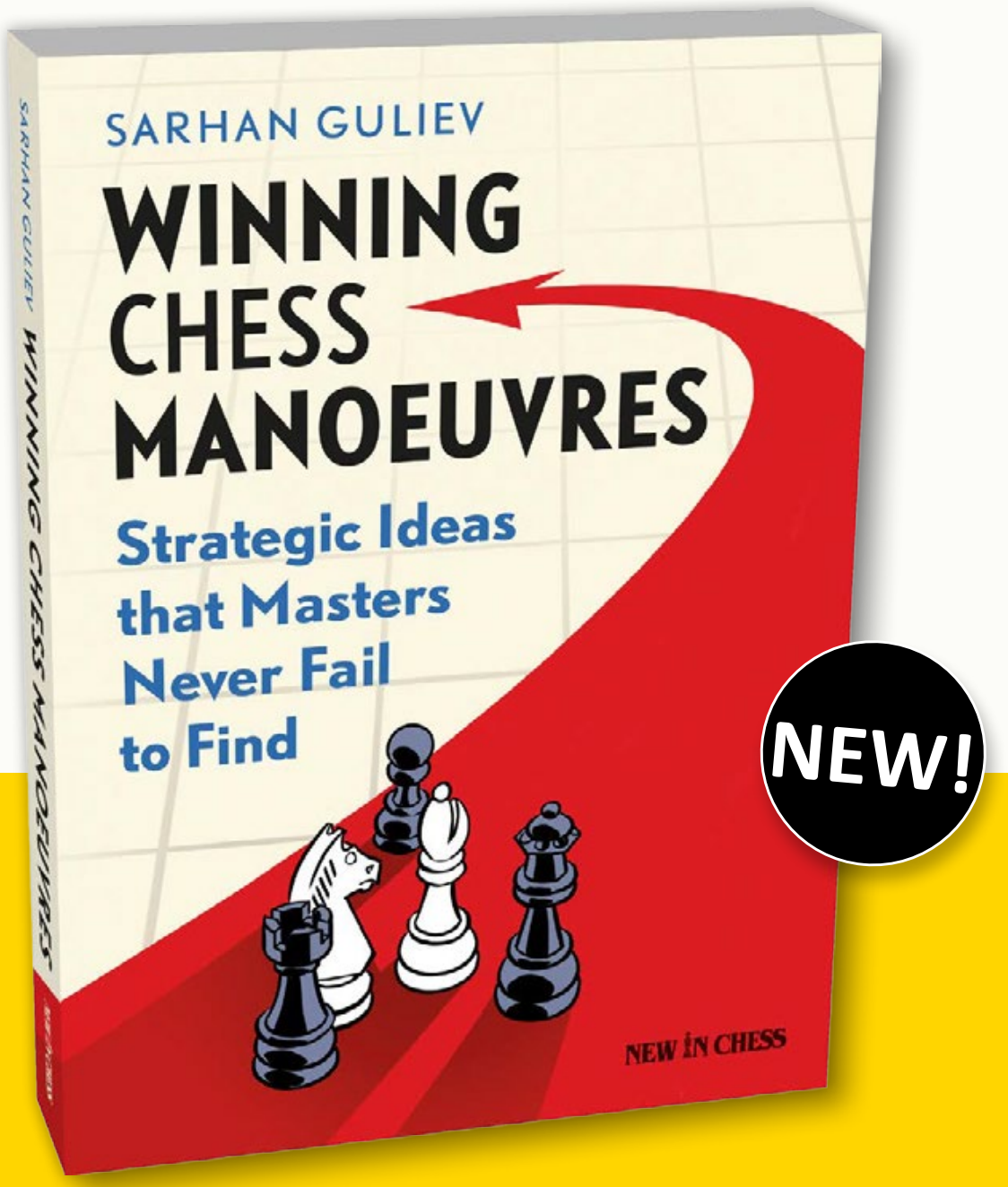
How do you relax?
Watch sports, crack jokes with my Dad, take long walks.

If you could change one thing in the chess world, what would it be?
The prize-funds. Because we chess players deserve better. I would also love to see more Fischer Random.

What is the stupidest rule in chess?
En passant.

What is the best thing that was ever said about chess?
Avoid the crowd. Do your own thinking independently. Be the Chess Player, not the Chess Piece (Ralph Charell).

Club players are often fumbling in the dark, their heads spinning with general rules and vague notions



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